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ABSTRACT

This document consists of the first four volumes of the annual serial publication "Perspectives: A Journal of Research and Opinion about Educational Service Agencies." Educational service agencies (ESAs) have various names and characteristics across states, but all provide services to local education agencies in a specific geographic region. ESAs offer smaller and poorer districts the economic benefits of shared services and collaboration. This journal includes descriptions, research, and opinion pieces related to the design and operation of ESAs throughout the United States. Volume 1 contains the following articles: "Filling the Vacuum: The Beginnings of a National Database on Educational Service Agencies" (E. Robert Stephens, Lee Christiansen); "ESA Cost-Effectiveness Documented in Washington State Study" (Brian L. Talbott); "Michigan Educational Service Agencies Document Collaboration" (Larry Engel, Teresa Pruden); "Proving ESAs Save Dollars: A Research Design That Works" (M. Craig Stanley); "Inland Empire Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program: A Journey toward Teacher Expertise" (Linda D. Scott, Linda Childress); "Statewide Strategic Planning: Iowa's Area Education Agencies Are on the Journey" (J. Gary Hayden); and "Perspectives on the Role of Educational Service Agencies" (Walt Mickler). Volume 2 contains the following articles: "The Politics of Educational Service Agencies: 1996-2000" (Bruce Hunter); "Cost-Analysis Studies of Programs and Services of State Networks of ESAs" (E. Robert Stephens, Hobart L. Harmon); "Positioning ESAs for Future Success" (Ronald S. Fielder); "ESAs and Charter Schools: Defining the Role" (Nicholas C. Timmer); "Computer Services for the Next Century" (Bruce Curran, Noah P. Sessions); "The Five 'C's of an ESD" (Jasmine Chase); "The Northwest Iowa AEA Cooperative: A Model of Cooperation" (J. Gary Hayden); and "One Regional Agency's Game Plan for School Restructuring" (Rose Stellman). Volume 3 has the theme "ESA's as Catalysts of Collaboration" and contains the following articles: "Moving to Market-Driven ESAs" (Edward T. Frye); "Public Schools, Public Pride: A County Showcase" (James G. Redmond, Shelley Yorke Rose); "Using ESAs as Catalysts for Interagency Collaboration" (William J. Bassett); "Reaching Agreement: Building Capacity in Education Service Agencies for Interagency

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Collaboration" (Cynthia Eagan Martin, Mary Margaret Salls); "Client Views of Texas Service Centers: Research Findings from the Service Centers 2000 Study" (Kay Thomas); "Connecticut RESC Cost Effectiveness" (Susan Olsen Wallerstein); "Educational Service Agencies: An International Perspective" (Ruud J. Gorter); "Dedicated Staff and Grant Funds Enrich Programs for At-Risk Youth" (William A. Le Doux, Anthony J. Amodeo); "Self-Supporting, Self-Sustaining Student Programming" (Bruce D. Vilders); "Supporting Schools through Leadership and Innovative Practices in Special Education" (Martin J. Ikeda, James Stumme, Randy Allison, W. David Tilly III); "Facilitating Specialized Intervention and Integration: A Collaborative School-Wide Team Assistance Project" (Carmen J. Iannaccone, Frank J. Herstek); and "From Woodshed to State Capitol" (Twyla G. Barnes, Kathy J. Rohrer). Volume 4 has the theme "Accountability for ESAs: Is Accreditation the Answer?" and contains the following articles: "Coming of Age" (Brian L. Talbott); "Standards and Performance Measures on the Horizon" (E. Robert Stephens, Hobart L. Harmon); "An Accountability System for Regional Education Service Centers: The Approach in Texas" (Judy M. Castleberry, Felipe Alanis); "Oregon's Regional Education Service Agencies: Evolution of Accountability from Territorial Commissioner to Education Service District" (James G. Maxwell); "Iowa's Area Education Agency Accreditation Standards: Moving towards Alignment of an Educational System" (Judy Jeffrey); "Can Educators Responsibly License Each Other?" (Sue Showers, David P. Moore); "The Galileo Consortium: An ESA Link to Local Districts and Community Colleges" (Frederica C. Frost, Joyce Fouts, Michael P. Flanagan, Sharon C. Dodson); "ESA Consortia for Networking Using the Internet" (Thomas F. Kelly); and "Rural, Remote, and Underserved" (Bruce D. Vilders). (SV)

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PERSPECTIVES

Volume 1, Number 1

A Journal of Research and Opinion

about

EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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Introduction

Anyone who has ever visited a major automobile exhibit will likely testify that a great part of the excitement is the opportunity to view what the industry calls "concept cars."

These are vehicles that embody some of the newest thinking in engineering and/or design. Though few concept cars ever make it to mass production, often because they are too expensive to build or are too radical in their appearance, they embody at least the kernel of one or more elements that will impact the development of vehicles in the future.

To some extent this publication plays a similar concept role. The idea of a separate journal for AAESA was considered by the Council in September, 1994 and approved in December of that year. Discussion centered around whether it was wise to start with a scholarly journal or a more general magazine format. The final decision was to start and let needs and interests point a clearer direction.

You are reading Volume I, Number 1 of Perspectives, the only publication devoted to issues related to the design and operation of educational service agencies throughout America. Its contents were determined largely by the membership in that we have printed all the materials written exclusively for and submitted to this publication. Articles are here because people wanted to help us get such a publication off the ground. AAESA members will now read it and decide whether a journal should be a continuing benefit of membership in the organization. Positive or negative feedback about the general idea should be communicated to members of the AAESA Council.

The Council approved this initiative because it is clear that virtually all national organizations, especially educational organizations, help communicate with their members and, perhaps of equal importance, with the larger community through a publication. This journal need not make a clear choice between scholarship and general information regarding educational service agencies. In the early stages of growing such a publication, a mix of content may well be the best choice.

This initial issue, interestingly, has a strong focus on scholarship if that word is interpreted to mean the collection of data with or without review of the literature. Three of the articles describe studies done regarding the cost effectiveness of educational service agencies. One was initiated by the Washington State legislature (Brian Talbot). Two others came through agency initiative, one by Michigan ESAs (Larry Engel) and the other a condensation of some aspects of a doctoral study of service agency cost effectiveness in New York State (Craig Stanley).

Another article (Stephens and Christensen) represents the first attempt to compile a reliable data base about educational service agencies throughout the nation. A fifth (Scott and Childress) examines the impact of a collaboration between two universities, two county offices of education (ESAs), and 17 school districts in California. A sixth article (J. Gary Hayden) summarizes efforts at strategic planning in Iowa, a process designed to be "proactive in determining the future directions of Iowa's educational service units."

The final article (Walt Mickler) might best be described as an essay. The author looks at very important issues related to the future of educational service agencies.

Research, innovative projects, an opinion piece- lots of possibilities for a continuing journal are explored.

It has taken over six months to get this first issue into print. Manuscripts had to be solicited, printing and distribution processes determined, and a host of other logistics issues resolved. Therefore we have not tried to do everything we might eventually hope to accomplish if the publication is continued and evolves. For example in future publications we would like to provide a state by state update of events affecting educational service agencies, especially legislative events. We would also like to solicit articles from opinion makers such as state legislators, state superintendents of public instruction, and perhaps business leaders who have experience in working with service agencies. Such articles can help keep service agencies in front of the public consciousness, reminding decision makers of what we are able to do so well but so often without public recognition.

Now we are down to one decision. Should the publication continue?

Let me conclude with one anecdote. In my new role as college professor I was asked to serve on a committee charged with helping to select a new dean for the School of Education and Human Services at my school, Oakland University (Rochester, Michigan). I volunteered to pick up one of the two finalists at the airport. He is currently dean of a school of education at one of the state colleges in the New York system. In making small talk and in order to explain in meaningful terms to him my most recent role as an ISD superintendent, I explained I had been head of an agency in Michigan very much like the New York State BOCES. This knowledgeable educator opined that New York State was experiencing financial troubles, and he doubted that the state could afford these structures much longer. He is apparently one of many in New York State who needs to know about Craig Stanley's work. However, this is not, as we know, exclusively a New York State problem.

William G. Keane
Editor

FILLING THE VACUUM: THE BEGINNINGS OF NATIONAL DATABASE ON EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES

by
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Lee Christiansen
Director of Membership Services, American Association of Educational Service Agencies

In the Fall of 1994, the Executive Council of the American Association of Educational Service Agencies (AAESA) launched the first of what is intended to be a series of data collection efforts designed to build a national database on educational services agencies (ESAs). The tentatively identified objectives for the database are three in number: enhance the capacity of AAESA to provide policy relevant information concerning ESAs that would inform national and state policy debates; serve as a depository of information to assist the research and school improvement communities in inquiries on the workings of ESAs; and, importantly, serve as a depository of information that would facilitate individual ESAs holding membership in AAESA to electronically access information on their counterparts across the country.

This article summarizes information collected in the first phase of what will be a multi-year effort. Priority was given to including data on selected characteristics of the "state systems" where one or more ESAs holding membership in AAESA is located. In the framing of specific questions concerning these "state systems" an emphasis was given to topics judged to be of high interest to the membership. A secondary, but still important, emphasis was given to posing lead questions that have the potential for setting the stage for further, more in-depth, inquiries that are viewed to be of high interest in the policy, research, and school improvement communities.

For purposes of this summary report, the term "state system" is used very liberally. The intent is to establish some of the critical state level contextual features under which an AAESA member functions. Two "state systems" (Alaska and South Carolina) are represented by a single service agency. Several other "state systems" are represented by a larger number, but not a statewide network. The majority of the "state systems," however, have either a complete statewide system of ESAs that can serve all local districts in the state or a virtual statewide network able to serve a substantial majority of local districts.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

AAESA staff designated a state data coordinator in each state having one or more ESAs holding membership in AAESA who was asked to complete a survey instrument developed by the staff and reviewed by the Executive Council. The instrument was mailed to the state coordinators in the twenty-six states represented in AAESA in January, 1995.

Usable returns were received from twenty-two of the twenty-six state coordinators. The four states having one or more ESAs holding membership in AAESA not represented in this summary report are Georgia, Kentucky, Ohio, and Utah.

The data reported here are based on responses of the state coordinators. No independent verification of the self-reported information was made. Several state coordinators, however, did establish that they asked colleagues to review their responses prior to submitting the completed form to AAESA staff.

"STATE SYSTEMS" INCLUDED

The official title of the service units in the twenty-two states, the year the "state system" was created, the number of units in the system at the time it was created, and their number in the 1994-95 school year are shown in Table 1.

The 421 ESAs in the twenty-two states do not at this point include ESAs in still other states having services agencies that met AAESA's eligibility requirements for regular membership status:

> Educational service agencies created primarily for the purpose of providing educational service to multiple local education agencies...and open to multiple purpose and single purpose ESAs.

The 421 figure does not, for example, include those agencies in Georgia, Kentucky, Ohio, and Utah, as previously noted. Nor are the relatively large number of service-type organizations in still other "state systems" that satisfy AAESA definition (e.g., Arkansas, the newly created units in Missouri, the county superintendents in Arizona, Montana, and North Dakota, a number of whom clearly behave as regional service agencies not unlike those found elsewhere).

SELECTED STRUCTURAL FEATURES

Four lines of inquiry were given priority in this first phase. Of continuing interest to many is the ability to track changes in the structure of the state system, especially whether or not there have been changes over time in the number of operating units. As shown in Table 2, eight systems have reportedly experienced no changes in number since their first formation. An equal number witnessed an increase. A majority of these eight are typically classified as Cooperative ESAs (e.g., Colorado, Indiana, Kansas, New Jersey, Wyoming). On the other hand, all but one (Alaska) of the "state systems" reporting a decrease in the number of units are typically classified as Special District ESAs.

Also of continuing interest is the question of the policy strategy or strategies used by state and local advocates of the regional service agency concept to implement the concept; that is, to see their vision of what might be become reality in state law and practice. While the use of multiple strategies was common, it seems clear that the enactment of permissive legislation was the policy instrument, either of choice or necessity, in a majority of cases. The use of mandatory legislation is also common, though the use of this policy instrument was most common for those "state systems" created in earlier times, the 1960s and 1970s.

TABLE 1

"STATE SYSTEMS" OF INCLUDED IN NATIONAL DATA SYSTEM

State	Title of Units	Year Established	Number of Original Units	Number of Units 1994-95
1. Alaska	Regional Service Center	1976	5	1
2. California	County Office of Education	1859	58	58
3. Colorado	Board of Cooperative Educational Services	1965	2	18
4. Connecticut	Area Cooperative Educational Services	1976	6	6
5. Illinois	Regional Office of Education	1975	58	45
6. Inidana	Educational Service Center	1976	4	9
7. Iowa	Area Education Agency	1975	15	15
8. Kansas	Educational Service Center	1990	8	11
9. Massachusetts	Educational Collaborative	1974	12	36
10. Michigan	Intermediate School District	1962	60	57
11. Minnesota	Educational Cooperative Service Unit	1976	10	10
12. Nebraska	Educational Service Unit	1967	17	19
13. New Jersey	County Special Service School District	1971	3	8
14. New York	Boards of Cooperative Educational Services	1948	13	38
15. Oregon	Education Service District	1963	29	29
16. Pennsylvania	Intermediate Units	1970	29	29
17. South Carolina	Education Center	1967	--	1
18. Texas	Education Service Centers	1967	20	20
19. Washington	Educational Service District	1969	14	9
20. West Virginia	Regional Educational Service Agency	1972	8	8
21. Wisconsin	Cooperative Educational Service Agency	1965	19	12
22. Wyoming	Boards of Cooperative Educational Services	1970	2	11
	Total		378	421

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TABLE 2

SELECTED STRUCTURAL FEATURES

Feature	Frequency
Number of state systems established by (check all that apply):	
a. mandatory legislation	10
b. permissive legislation	14
c. executive order by governor	0
d. action of state board of education	3
e. action of state department of education	2
f. action by LEA governing boards	5
g. state constitution	1
Number of state systems reporting no changes in the number of ESAs since first year of operation.	8
Number of state systems experiencing a change in the number of ESAs since first year of operation:	
an increase in number	8
a decrease in number	5
Number of state systems reporting the existence of other ESA-type organizations in the state which provide programs and services to LEAs.	6

SELECTED ORGANIZATIONAL FEATURES

A summary of the organizational features of the "state systems" given prominence in this initial effort is provided in Table 3. Three probes of governance practices, the subject of frequent discussions, especially in the policy communities, are included.

The composition of ESA governing boards continues to reflect a strong commitment to provide constituent local school districts a key role in shaping the direction of ESA policy. This policy goal is achieved in part through the practice of having the ESA board composed of members of local district boards (the most common practice) or consisting of the superintendents of local districts.

The appointment process is the overwhelming choice for the selection of the chief executive officer of ESAs across the nation. This responsibility rests exclusively with the ESA board in seventeen of the "state systems" and is shared with the chief state school officer in two additional states (New York and Texas). The election of the chief executive officer of a service unit is limited to two states (53 of the 58 county superintendents in California and all the regional superintendents in Illinois).

TABLE 3

SELECTED ORGANIZATIONAL FEATURES

Feature	Frequency
Number of state systems having governing boards composed of (check all that apply):	-
lay citizens	6
LEA board members	12
LEA superintendents	5
other (combination of lay citizens, LEA boards and superintendents)	2
other (cited once - post-secondary, state education agency)	2
Number of state systems having uniform or varying number of members of governing boards:	-
uniform number	4
varying number	18
Number of state systems having governing boards composed of local citizens who are selected by:	-
general election	3
designated by LEA boards	15
appointed by state, other governmental units	3
Number of state systems where chief executive officer is selected by:	-
general election	2
appointed by ESA board	17
jointly appointed by ESA board and chief state school officer	2
Number of state systems having state statutes/regulations governing their operatives	21
Number of state systems having state standards and/or accreditation system governing their operations	10
Number of state systems having been the object of a comprehensive review sponsored by the state	10
Number of state systems having been the object of a cost-effectiveness/cost-efficiency study	4
Number of state systems that perform regulatory functions for the state education agency	7

Five lead "yes" or "no" questions especially intended to set the stage for more in-depth further investigations were also included in this initial probe of organizational features. The responses of the state coordinators indicate that:

- All "state systems" except one (South Carolina) are governed by state statutory and/or regulatory provisions; in a number of cases these are the same as those governing local district practices.
- Nearly one-half have been the object of a state sponsored comprehensive review; some of the reviews are reportedly sporadic, others at periodic set times (e.g., every five years in the case of Texas, every three years in the case of Wisconsin).
- Four of the "state systems" have reportedly been the object of a cost-effectiveness/cost-efficiency study (California, New York, Oregon, Washington); these types of studies were most frequently reported to have been completed in relatively recent years.
- Seven of the "state systems" reportedly are engaged in the performance of regulatory functions for the state education agency (California, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, New York, Washington, West Virginia); no clear pattern of regulatory functions that are performed is apparent.

SELECTED FINANCIAL AND PROGRAMMING FEATURES

The priorities established for profiling the financial and programming characteristics of "state systems" centered on what systems have taxing authority, the number that receive an annual state appropriation and the factors used in state funding formulas, mandated programs and services, and authority to contract with others for the delivery of services.

As shown in Table 4, only four "state systems" reportedly enjoy taxing authority to support their operations (California, Michigan, Nebraska, and Oregon). A fifth "state system," New Jersey, can do so indirectly through the County Board of School Estimates.

A majority of the "state systems," fourteen in all, receive an annual state appropriation. A variety of measures are in use in the construction of the state funding formula, with the student population served by the ESA and general administrative costs being the most frequently employed. Most state formulas, however, appear to make use of multiple factors. Eight additional factors are reportedly used in at least one state formula. Only two of these (Connecticut and Oregon) reportedly deal in a relatively direct way the increasingly critical issue of the wealth of the region served by the ESA as a determinant of how state funds are allocated to a service agency.

Thirteen of the "state systems" offer programs and services that are mandated by the state. Consistent across all is the requirement that the ESAs engage in some aspect of programming for special needs populations. Other frequently cited programming requirements are in the areas of staff development (eleven of the thirteen) and media/technology (in nine cases). Both of these functional areas are widely acknowledged to be central to the focus of recent school improvement strategies calling for the enhancement of the learning and teaching environment. A fairly large number of the less frequently cited mandated responsibilities of ESAs are essentially administrative functions commonly performed by a state agency (e.g., school district reorganization or boundary realignments, review of local district budgets) or those intended to provide administrative assistance to local districts.

TABLE 4

SELECTED FINANCIAL AND PROGRAMMING FEATURES

Feature	Frequency
Number of state systems having taxing authority	4
Number of state systems receiving an annual state appropriation and factors used in the formula (check all that apply):	14
general administrative costs	
student population served by ESA	8
student/LEA participation rates	10
other (cited once - staffing ratios, number of LEAs, property tax replacement, small LEAs, special education, migrant education)	2
Number of state systems offering programs and services mandated by statute or administrative rule and in what areas (check all that apply):	13
special education	
media/technology	13
staff development	9
health services	11
school district reorganization	3
school district boundaries	6
administration services	6
other (cited once - LEA elections, cooperative purchasing, transportation services, child accounting, gifted and talented, vocational/technical, pupil personnel, nonpublic schools, assistance low performing districts and schools)	4
Number of state systems that can contract with others to deliver programs and services (check all that apply):	18
local school districts	18
city/county governments	10
private/nonprofit organizations	18
Number of state systems authorized by state statute or administrative rule to collaborate with post secondary institutions	3

Two mandated services are of special note. The twenty Regional Educational Service Centers in Texas are now required to provide special assistance to low performing districts and schools. This is the only case specially cited where a "state system" is charged with playing a major role in what clearly has become one additional focus of much of the recent school reform movement - a concentration on poorly performing local systems and individual schools in a local system.

Pennsylvania Intermediate Units must provide selected programs and services to nonpublic schools. This is the only case of this type cited by a state coordinator.

SELECTED FEATURES OF STATE PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS OF ESAs

The database will include information that is believed to be the first profile of state professional associations of ESAs. As shown in Table 5, seventeen such groups were reportedly in existence in 1994-95.

A majority of the state associations sponsor an annual conference. Of the eight that are reportedly a part of another state professional group, affiliation with the local school district superintendents association is the most common alliance, as expected.

Also as expected, a strong majority of the state associations are engaged in legislative lobbying, ostensibly one of the primary motives for organizing a special interest group in the first place. A variety of arrangements are used to carry out this function. The use of a full- or part-time lobbyist is the most frequently reported practice. It is also true that most state groups use a combination of practices, such as coordinating the ESA legislative program with that of another state professional association, or multiple groups.

Though not widespread at the present time, five of the state ESA groups employ a part-time executive director (California, Colorado, Michigan, New Jersey, Oregon) to provide maintenance functions for the association. In three of the five, legislative work is reportedly a major responsibility of the part-time executive directors.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This first effort represents a beginning of what is hoped will ultimately be a comprehensive database on the workings of both individual ESAs as well as entire state systems of organizations of this type. That such a database is needed seems indisputable.

At present, no federal agency includes a description of ESAs in data collection efforts intended to periodically profile elementary-secondary education in the nation, despite the fact that many ESAs are fairly substantial enterprises in a relatively large number of states, and have been so for many years. The absence of comprehensive and timely data on how ESAs function has no doubt also hampered state planners and decision makers faced with the increasingly challenging task of weighing the costs and benefits of alternatives for improving the state system of elementary-secondary education.

Similarly, ESA staff and governing boards should realize substantial benefits from having access to information regarding the location of other ESAs throughout the United States operating under comparable contextual features or offering programs similar to those now offered by their agency or being considered by their agency.

Much work obviously remains to be done. The inclusion of individual ESA profiles is progressing, as the "state system" section of the database is being perfected. Once these two sections are in place, it is planned to give priority to enriching the database by the inclusion of in-depth data on a range of financing practices and rates of school district program participation.

ESA COST-EFFECTIVENESS DOCUMENTED IN WASHINGTON STATE STUDY

By
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Spokane, Washington

History suggests that whenever education budgets begin to tighten, schools rely more heavily on the cooperative service-delivery model embraced by educational service agencies (ESAs).

The late 1990s already are shaping up as a time in which history will repeat itself. Tight money at both the state and federal level is forcing local districts to adopt cooperative and innovative new approaches on a scale never before seen. As entities renowned for saving money and reducing duplication of effort, ESAs may be one of the few educational providers to emerge from our tough economic times in a larger and stronger posture.

The State of Washington offers a possible glimpse of the future for ESAs everywhere. Last year, the state's Legislative Budget Committee (LBC), the oversight arm of state government, conducted an exhaustive study of the state's nine ESAs — known in Washington as Educational Service Districts (ESDs).

LBC audits and evaluations are known for their objectivity and in-depth examination. Organizations seldom emerge from an LBC study without a list of recommended programmatic and budget changes to improve service delivery. Yet while LBC studies are tough, they're also fair because the committee's experienced staff is directed by members of both political parties from both houses of the state legislature.

As part of a larger school reform effort, the legislature determined a need last year for a study of ESDs. Once receiving its orders, the committee established specific objectives of 1) determining whether ESD services were cost-effective for local school districts, and 2) whether there was a need to adjust existing ESD boundaries.

For those of us associated with ESDs, the results of the study, released in February, were extremely gratifying. The study found that:

- "The recipients of ESD services were generally, if not highly, satisfied with the service they received." Districts reported that the primary benefit of ESDs was access to services that might be otherwise unavailable.

- "Local districts viewed ESD prices as affordable." The study found that the only alternative to many ESD services would be for districts to offer the services on their own, which would not be financially feasible for small- and medium-size districts.

- "There (are) no compelling cost-saving reasons to consolidate ESDs." Citing the need for personal contact with districts, the study said the costs associated with direct personnel would not change if services were centralized. Moreover, it said that if consolidation occurred, the impact on services would be unknown.

The study also commended the level of cooperation that already exists between existing ESDs. The closest the study came to offering a criticism was its suggestion that ESDs consider a single, small change. The study recommended that current joint-planning and sharing efforts be more formalized to achieve even greater savings. A more formal planning mechanism, it concluded, would allow each ESD to think of itself as part of a whole, rather than as a stand-alone organization.

The study went on to chronicle the types of services offered by ESDs, the various sources of revenue and a statistical profile on the number of districts served.

Few of us with ESD backgrounds were surprised by the findings since they confirmed what we have said for years — that ESDs are one of the best bargains in Washington state education. The study only added legitimacy to our words. The confirmation of a legislative oversight group — one not known for pulling punches — amounted to high praise indeed.

Our statewide ESD system has been successful, in part, because of the leadership of outstanding board members, the thorough execution of dedicated employees, and the ongoing review of client needs which allows us to quickly respond to changing conditions.

Washington is not unique in its structure or quality of personnel. ESAs around the country boast some of the finest staff in the entire education industry. Ironically, their contributions often go unrecognized, as public recognition of schools often stops at the local district level. Many are not aware of the major role — or, in some cases, even the existence — of ESAs.

That is about to change. The prominence of ESAs can only grow as local districts watch student needs move one way, while budgets move the opposite way. ESAs cannot single-handedly bridge a budget gap, but they can be major factors in reducing the imbalance in local district spending and taking the pressure off local budgets.

There's an old saying that out of every problem comes an opportunity. That is the way ESA's must approach their work in the tumultuous times of the 1990s.

MICHIGAN EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES DOCUMENT COLLABORATION

by
Larry Engel, Superintendent
Teresa Pruden, Superintendent's Assistant
Saginaw Intermediate School District
Saginaw, Michigan

At a meeting in the summer of 1994, the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) decided to develop a document to help the governor, legislators, state department officials, our constituent districts and the public understand the role of Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) within the total community. The result was a survey developed to compile the collaborative services ISDs in Michigan share with other ISDs, colleges and universities, human service agencies, businesses and other organizations.

The results of the survey show over 2,000 collaborative services shared among the 57 ISDs and the various organizations and agencies in Michigan. Note that the collaborative services reported do not include the direct services provided to our local education agencies (LEAs). The addition of LEA services would increase the total number of collaborative services significantly.

The breakdown of collaborative services with other agencies is as follows:

• other ISD's	713
• colleges and universities	460
• human service agencies	538
• business and industry	246
• others	103
TOTAL	2,060

Perhaps surprisingly, the size of an ISD as measured by student population was not a determinant in the number of collaborative services available within any ISD. Whether small or large, ISDs are actively collaborating with a large number and a wide variety of agencies and organizations throughout their communities.

By providing a vehicle for collaborative services, ISDs have a significant economic impact on our state. Collaborative efforts to provide professional development, distance learning, technical assistance, audio visual resources, personnel services, transportation, technology, social services, mental health, public health, business partnerships and employment opportunities are just a few of the areas where ISDs save taxpayers dollars. There is no other organization to fill the role of ISDs.

Finally, it is interesting to note that many ISDs will add collaborative services in the next survey, as they have realized that they neglected to report several of their collaborative services on the first initiative.

If ISDs did not exist in Michigan, they would have to be created to deliver low cost services to and for the various agencies and organizations in our communities throughout the State of Michigan. No other organization is in a position to fill that void.

For further information and examples, please call Larry Engel, Superintendent, or Teresa Pruden, Superintendent's Assistant, at Saginaw Intermediate School District, (517) 799-4736.

PROVING ESAs SAVE DOLLARS: A RESEARCH DESIGN THAT WORKS

by
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The American educational system is going through a period of intensive critical evaluation. Numerous studies over the past decade have demonstrated the need for significant reform in our schools if we are to address the needs of our rapidly changing society. Several national trends have propelled this need for change in our schools, including the following (Batchelder, Stanley; 1990):

- our rapidly escalating trade deficit, indicative of our need to become more competitive in the world economy;
- changing demographics in the student population, reflecting a greater diversity in social, economic and cultural background;
- increasing numbers of "at-risk" students, including school dropouts and those with social, emotional and other difficulties who are unable to profit from the traditional school curricula and require alternative educational services;
- a growing disparity between the quality of educational services offered to children from affluent suburbs versus that for children from inner cities or rural areas
- the increasing difficulty of offering quality public services in the face of overwhelming budget constraints.

This combination of factors presents an apparent dilemma. On the one hand, schools are facing new and complex challenges which require considerable financial resources to address. On the other hand, the ability of many school districts to address these challenges is severely hampered due to federal, state and local budget constraints.

These unprecedented challenges cannot be addressed efficiently if each individual school district tries to meet them alone. To minimize the impact on instructional services to students , school officials must examine every possible way to streamline administrative and support services so as to maximize cost effectiveness and avoid duplication of effort.

According to Stephens (1990), a national expert on interdistrict collaboration, activities typically assigned to educational service agencies (ESAs) tend to exhibit one or more of the following characteristics: high cost activity, activity requiring concentration of students, activity requiring a high level of staff competency, and/or a prerequisite of costly equipment or facilities. A regional activity, such as one provided by an ESA, should result in an improvement over the individual district activity in at least one of three variables: efficiency, quality and equity. These three criteria are critical to the success of a regional ESA activity, and form the theoretical basis for the research design.

Equity, quality and efficiency are the most frequently cited benefits of interdistrict ESA programs and services. In almost every publication regarding ESAs, these three charac-

teristics are mentioned. They are the logical criteria to evaluate the value of regional services; however, they must be considered with respect to their combined impact. For example, a regional mode of service delivery may be cost effective, but if the quality of the service is lacking, its overall effectiveness is diminished. Similarly, a regional delivery mechanism may be of high quality, but if it is not cost effective, implementation may not be feasible. And if a regional service favors one district over another, thereby promoting inequity, it may be politically, not to mention ethically, impractical.

It is the thesis of this article that the dollars spent on education can be spent much more efficiently through greater regionalization. To make informed decisions about which programs and services can be offered more efficiently on a regional basis, cost analysis, the basic tool of cost-effectiveness study, is required.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The elements of a tested research design follow, developed as part of a doctoral dissertation conducted by the author (Stanley, 1992) at Boston College. The original research involved eight school districts in northeastern Massachusetts. The design that follows has been modified to be transportable to examine almost any activity that an ESA might consider undertaking. The design focuses on determining the potential difference in efficiency, quality and equity when a proposed regional ESA activity is compared to individual school district activities. The design yields a detailed cost comparison between the two options so that potential savings can be calculated.

Proper Planning

A thorough examination of the potential effectiveness of a new regional activity requires the support and cooperation of many individuals, especially since the activity will involve several school districts. The chances that a study will be successful are enhanced if the researcher spends time building a solid foundation of support among members of his governing board and officials of participating school districts.

The author recommends that the researcher convene a meeting with the governing board of the ESA to decide on the area(s) in which a new regional service delivery model will be studied. The support of the superintendents of the participating school districts should be enlisted and their authorization obtained to collect data on their districts, including financial data. The district superintendents should name the stake holders within their district who will be the primary source of data for a particular activity. *Stake holders should be the primary persons within each district responsible for the activity under study.* For example, if a shared media center is proposed, the stake holders should be the district media specialists. If a shared job bank or staff recruitment effort is proposed, the stake holders should be the district personnel directors. Stake holders should be empowered by their superintendents to speak for the district on the activity under study.

The researcher should then meet with the district stake holders to develop the regional service delivery model. Their assistance will be vital throughout the study, as the researcher will be relying on them to obtain necessary financial and other data.

Developing the Analytic Framework

The regional model developed by the stake holders now must be "costed out." Levin (1983) describes five general ingredients to consider when computing the cost of an educational service: *personnel, facilities, equipment and materials, other inputs* (those that do not fit into one of the first three categories) *and client inputs* (resources contributed by the clients or their families). The cost for the existing individual school district activities for all participating districts and the cost for the proposed regional activity need to be computed and compared to determine if one can expect a savings through the regional activity.

Levin (1983) describes four different types of cost analyses used to evaluate educational programs and services, as follows:

- Cost-effectiveness (CE) analysis refers to the evaluation of alternatives according to both their costs and their effects with regard to producing some outcome or set of outcomes. The alternative chosen would be the one that provides the maximum effectiveness per level of cost or which requires the least cost per level of effectiveness.
- Cost-benefit (CB) analysis refers to the evaluation of alternatives according to a comparison of both their costs and benefits when each is measured in monetary terms. It attempts to measure the values of both the costs and the benefits of each alternative in terms of monetary units, choosing the alternative that has the highest ratio of benefits to costs.
- Cost-utility (CU) analysis refers to an evaluation of alternatives according to a comparison of their costs and the estimated utility or value of their outcomes. CU analysis is appropriate when subjective assessments must be made about the nature and probability of educational outcomes as well as their relative values.
- Cost-feasibility (CF) analysis refers to the method of estimating only the costs of an alternative to determine whether or not it can be considered, that is, whether or not the costs are within the budget

Levin's cost-utility (CU) analysis is usually the most useful of the four cost- analyses for determining the potential effectiveness of new ESA service models, as it refers to *an evaluation of alternatives according to a comparison of their costs and the estimated utility or value of their outcomes*. Cost-utility analysis is appropriate when subjective assessments must be made about the nature and probability of educational outcomes as well as their relative values. Subjective assessments must be utilized when we are dealing with outcomes that can not be accurately measured in advance, such as student achievement. The stake holders, therefore, should be the ones who rate the utility of the alternatives, as they are in the best position to be able to judge the potential quality of the proposed regional service.

When our primary concern is monetary, such as in considering the savings a regional data-processing center might afford to school districts, Levin's cost-benefit (CB) analysis can be employed, as it refers to the evaluation of alternatives according to a comparison of both their costs and benefits when each is measured in monetary terms. Here we can simply choose the alternative that has the highest ratio of benefits to costs.

Therefore, the activity under study is assigned to one of the four types of analysis, the rationale for such assignment explained and the probable cost ingredients of each alternative described.

For example, a regional model for staff recruitment (advertising, screening) and "recycling" (e.g., job bank) utilizes a cost-utility analysis. The cost of each district to recruit and "recycle" staff is compared to the cost for the ESA to provide these services for its member districts. The value of each alternative is judged by the appropriate school personnel (typically the personnel director or the assistant superintendent in charge of personnel) in terms of overall efficiency, quality and equity of service. It is hypothesized that a larger advertisement run on a more frequent basis in more publications will yield a greater number of applicants, increasing the chances of finding a well qualified candidate. In addition, by keeping a central file of applicants, each district could draw upon an existing source of recent applicants who were not selected for the position for which they applied. This file would also contain applications of staff who have been laid-off by neighboring districts, a very important consideration given the current budget cuts and subsequent layoffs. By rehiring these staff, districts are availing themselves of a "known quantity" as well as saving their neighboring district the cost of continuing to pay unemployment compensation benefits. The cost ingredients of each alternative include the money each district spends to advertise for staff and the personnel time spent placing the ads and screening applications.

The cooperative purchasing of printing services utilizes a cost-benefit analysis. The projected cost of a cooperative purchase (quotes obtained from print shops based on estimated annual volume of sales) are compared to the cost that each district spends individually to contract-out the printing of stationary, envelopes, brochures, curriculum guides and other materials that require equipment and/or expertise they lack. The benefit to the participating purchasing entities will be measured in terms of monetary savings, although the business administrators will also be asked to rate the proposed ESA activity in terms of efficiency, quality and equity of service. Cost ingredients include personnel (for administration of the bidding process), materials (legal notices, paper, postage) and the cost of the actual contracted printing service.

Data collection and analysis

For activities utilizing cost-utility (CU) analysis, the stake holders are asked to judge the utility or value of the two alternatives (individual district and ESA) on their estimated efficiency, quality of service and equity of service across districts. This subjective data is solicited via a questionnaire using a five point Likert scale, a response of "5" indicating the stake holder predicts the ESA activity will result in far greater quality, for example, than the individual school district activity and a response of "1" indicating that the stake holder predicts the ESA activity will result in far less quality, for example, than the individual school district activity.

By applying t-tests to the data, the results of the Likert scale questionnaire indicate the level of significance of the stake holder's predictions. The t-test is a useful tool, even when working with samples as small as five. Levels of significance over .05 are considered significant; generally speaking, the higher the level of significance, the more reliable the

prediction. In the author's experience, significance levels of .001 and greater are not unusual.

Cost data is collected from audited school district financial reports. Frequently, the level of specificity of the cost data requires a review of vendor files in order to determine the cost center to which an expenditure is allocated. The cost of the individual district activity can then be compared to the projected cost of the ESA activity. An inflation factor reflecting any increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) must be applied to the actual district cost data as these figures are likely to be between one and three years older than the projected costs of the ESA activity. Estimated savings can be determined by subtracting the projected cost of the ESA activity from the cost of the individual district activities.

As stated earlier, for a regional service to be viable, it must result in improved efficiency, quality or equity of service over the individual school district mechanism. By utilizing this design, we now have comparative cost data as well as stake holders' predictions on relative efficiency, quality and equity.

Implementation and Evaluation

Armed with the comparative cost data (reflecting projected savings in terms of percentage and actual dollar amounts per district) and the stake holders' ratings on relative efficiency, quality and equity (including the level of statistical significance), the ESA governing board can now make an informed decision whether or not to implement the new ESA activity.

It is suggested that ESA and/or grant funds be utilized for a two-year pilot of the new ESA activity. During this time, stake holders should continue to meet regularly to monitor the new activity, to "fine tune" its operation and to ensure that it is meeting district needs.

Three semiannual formative evaluations and one final summative evaluation of the new activity are suggested. At the end of the two-year pilot project, if evaluative data indicate that the ESA activity is effective in meeting district needs, "hard" (school district or state) funds should be allocated to continue the activity.

STUDY RESULTS

According to Stephens (1990), there is a dearth of data demonstrating the cost effectiveness of interdistrict cooperative efforts. The results of a four studies follow.

The Stanley Study

The first component of this research (Stanley, 1992) compared the cost of individual school districts performing six specific services to the projected cost of the districts acting jointly to provide the services. Levin's (1983) cost-utility and cost-benefit analyses were utilized to conduct the comparison.

Actual fiscal year 1990 costs for eight school districts in northeastern Massachusetts were compared to the projected costs of a collaborative service, as determined by the researcher and appropriate administrators of each of the eight districts participating in the study.

Analyses of the cost data indicated a clear and significant savings in three of the six services studied: shared recruitment / job bank, shared staff for low-enrollment courses and cooperative purchase of printing services. Projected savings in these three areas were 39%, 78% and 22%, respectively. Very slight and insignificant differences in cost were indicated in the grants directory (1.2% less expensive) and learning resource library (1.7% more expensive). A cost comparison of data-processing services was unable to be performed because the assessment of a collaborative model by the school districts' administrators indicated that it was not a viable option.

Analyses of the five services for which cost comparisons could be performed indicate that the FY 90 cost to the eight school districts to provide the five services individually was $623,497 while the adjusted FY 90 cost of the districts collaborating with each other to provide the services was $294,987. These figures indicate a projected total savings of $328,510, or 52.7%.

By considering the data on 1) comparative costs and 2) comparative ratings of efficiency, quality and equity of services between the individual school district service and the collaborative service, it is possible to draw some conclusions as to whether it is in the best interest of a school district to consider collaboration with its neighboring districts. The data obtained through this study of eight school districts support the following conclusions in each area of study.

1. *Shared staff recruitment and job bank services* The proposed collaborative model would save the eight participating school districts $19,203 in FY 1990 dollars. This figure represents a savings of 39.2%. Although there may be no improvement in efficiency (other than cost savings, as demonstrated), the personnel directors stated that they would expect improvements both in quality of service and in equity of service across districts.

2. *Shared instructional staff for low-enrollment courses:* The two proposed collaborative models, 1) an evening school and 2) day classes through interactive telecommunications, would save the school districts $113,848 and $174,633, respectively. This represents a savings of 82.6% for the evening school and 72.4% for the interactive telecommunications. The principals of the five participating comprehensive high schools agreed that while they would not expect any difference between the quality of the collaborative service and the quality of their own individual district's service, they would expect an improvement both in the efficiency of the collaborative service and the equity of service across districts.

3. *Audio-visual materials and instructional software:* A shared lending library and cooperative planning and purchasing of materials would cost the participating school districts $1,451 more the first year than they currently spend, primarily because of the time and money required to develop a computerized on-line data base of available materials and to coordinate inter-district transfer of materials. The 1.7% increase in costs is minimal when one considers the benefits of an expanded selection of available materials. The audiovisual specialists of the districts expected that the collaborative model would result in an improvement in all three areas, especially efficiency and equity of service across districts.

4. *Grant writing:* An on-line computerized database of grants available to school districts would actually save the districts $127 a year. While this is only a 1.2% savings, it is very significant when one considers the wealth of information that would immediately be available to each district's grant personnel through the on-line database. The savings, if any, of a shared grant writer was impossible to assess, as the degree of success such an individual would experience in attracting funds is unknown. The districts' grant writers, however, expected that both the directory of available grants and the services of a shared grant writer would result in an improvement in all three areas of efficiency, quality and equity.

5. *Cooperative purchase of printing services:* It is expected that a joint bid for printing services would save participating districts 22%. Based on approximately $100,000 a year volume, this amounts to a savings of $22,150. The school personnel responsible for contracted printing services expected an improvement in all three areas, especially efficiency.

6. *Shared data-processing services:* Two collaborative models were examined in the area of data processing: smaller districts purchasing services from larger districts with sophisticated facilities and a centralized data-processing facility to handle the needs of all eight districts. The FY 90 cost to all districts for data processing was a considerable $1,979,481, or $58.22 per pupil based on an FY 90 enrollment of 34,000 students in all districts. As stated earlier, given the negative response of many of the data-processing specialists to the collaborative activities, it was impossible to project the cost of a collaborative activity, as the cooperation and assistance of all of the specialists would have been required to obtain all the information needed to develop a viable collaborative model.

In conclusion, the data strongly support the development of collaborative services in all areas studied except data processing.

Southwest and West Central ECSU Study

A very comprehensive cost-savings analysis was conducted by the Southwest and West Central Educational Cooperative Service Unit in Marshall, MN (1989). For every service offered by this ECSU, the cost through the ESA was compared to the cost if the ESA were not involved. Figures for the 1988-1989 school year (FY 89) were used for all analyses. Results for four major service categories follow:

- Special Education: The cost of services through the ECSU were compared to the cost of services through private schools, mental health centers and hospitals. During FY 89, member districts paid $1,176,101 to the ECSU. It is estimated that in the private sector, member districts would have paid $3,767,550. The resulting savings of $2,591,449 represents a 69% savings to the participating districts.
- Cooperative Purchasing: The cost of supplies purchased through the ECSU joint bid are compared to the cost if the supplies were purchased directly from vendors. A total ECSU cost of $3,324,944 was compared to a total vendor price of $4,443,944. The resultant savings of $1,118,726 represents a 25% overall savings. A breakdown by

product follows: custodial supplies - 28%; school paper - 37%; office and classroom furniture and AV equipment - 19%; computer equipment and supplies - 19%; food - 13%; and miscellaneous supplies - 51%.

- Film Services: The ECSU rental price per film or videotape ($6.84) was compared to their alternative, the film library at the University of Wisconsin, where the cost averaged $21.14 per film or videotape. ESCU fees for this service during 1988-1989 were $240,546. The comparison cost would have been $752,909. The resultant savings was *$512,363, or 68%.*
- Workshops: For this comparison, a relatively conservative estimated cost of $50 per day for workshops offered through other agencies was compared to the ECSU average daily price of $27.32. During FY 89 member districts spent $79,296 for ECSU workshops, as 2903 staff participated. The cost for private sector training was estimated at $145,140. The resultant savings of $65,854 represents a 45% savings.

Overall, member districts of the Southwest and West Central ECSU spent $11,409,798 for services during 1988-1989. Without the benefit of the ECSU, they would have spent an estimated $16,926,415. The difference of $5,516,617 represents an overall savings of 33%.

Greater Lawrence Educational Collaborative Study

Since 1979, the Greater Lawrence Educational Collaborative (GLEC) in Lawrence, Massachusetts has been comparing its tuition rates and fee schedules for special education programs and services to rates available in the private sector (Stanley, 1995). Each year, GLEC's rates are compared to the rates of comparable private placements and private vendors that are actually utilized by its member school districts. Stanley has included the results of his analysis of savings in GLEC's Annual Report each year since 1979. The most recent projection of savings is for the 1995-1996 school year. He projects a cost to member districts of $2,152,690 for GLEC special education services versus an estimated cost of $2,766,320 for comparable services in the private sector. The difference of $613,630 represents a 22% savings in tuitions alone. This figure does not include the savings on transportation costs, as GLEC's programs are usually more centrally located to students' homes than are the private placements. Since the inception of this analysis (FY 79), Stanley estimates that GLEC member school districts have saved $13,221,163 in special education tuitions through interdistrict collaboration.

Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives Study

In 1988, the Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives (MOEC, 1988) conducted a survey among its member collaboratives to determine the estimated savings realized by collaborative programs and services. Although very informal in nature, the survey demonstrated the following savings:

- Collaborative tuitions for special education programs range between 40% and 60% of private day school costs.
- Cooperative special needs transportation saves 20% to 30% versus the cost of each district contracting on its own for such services.
- An innovative residential program started by one collaborative has the potential to save $40,000 to $50,000 per student per year.

- Related services (therapies) provided by a collaborative through an itinerant model saves 25% to 50% on hourly rates charged by private agencies.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Studies indicate that many ESA activities result in a savings when the costs of the regional activity are compared to the costs of individual school district activity. Typical savings range from 15% to 50%. Studies also indicate that ESA activities have the potential to improve overall efficiency, quality and equity of educational opportunity.

Given the growing disparity between the resources available to inner city and rural areas versus the wealthier suburbs, special attention should be focused on the potential of ESA activities to improve equity of services across districts.

More research is needed, especially follow up studies after an ESA activity actually has been implemented, to confirm the results of preliminary research.

ESAs have the potential to play a very important role as our nation reshapes its schools to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Research demonstrating their effectiveness will maximize that potential.

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INLAND EMPIRE BEGINNING TEACHER SUPPORT AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAM: A JOURNEY TOWARD TEACHER EXPERTISE

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Introduction

My descent from innocence was swift and brutal. I was given a temporary roll sheet, assigned a room actually three different rooms and with little other preparation was thrust into the world of teaching.

(Shulman & Colbert, 1988)

A large body of evidence from research and practice demonstrates for us repeatedly and concretely that first year teachers need to be mentored and supported during their first years of classroom responsibility. This beginning teacher support is often the key to initiating a new teacher's successful career and is most effective when the new teacher is able to establish a trusting relationship with experts who can provide informative feedback about classroom outcomes. Novice teachers are expected to be able to control and manage a classroom effectively and productively and to develop for themselves habits of mind and action characteristic of veteran teachers. Often given the least desirable teaching assignments, novice teachers are expected to equate professionalism with personal success and to accept initial feelings of inadequacy, isolation and helplessness as a "passage" into teaching. It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that new teachers often become demoralized and dispirited, anxious about their own efficacy, personal character and capacity to cope with the myriad demands of teaching.

> *I feel I cannot go to my principal or other more experienced teachers for help because I am afraid they will interpret it as weakness, or worse, incompetence. I learned this very quickly during the first few weeks of school.*
>
> First Year Kindergarten Teacher,
> California New Teacher Project, 1990.

In the Inland Empire Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (IE- BTSA), beginning teachers and mentors alike experience professional growth as they work together to develop successful teaching strategies, learn to offer and accept feedback on teaching activities, and train to use the California Framework of Knowledge, Skills and

Abilities for Beginning Teachers in California. Integral to the use of this framework and to IE-BTSA is the major developmental focus centered on pedagogical knowledge and teaching strategies for working with diverse students.

Funded by the State Department of Education and the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, The Inland Empire Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (IE-BTSA) is a consortium of two county offices of education, 17 school districts, and two universities. The project provides support and assessment services to 180 beginning teachers in the Riverside-San Bernardino counties. Irving G. Hendrick, Dean and Professor, University of California, Riverside, School of Education; Douglas E. Mitchell, Professor and Managing Director of the California Educational Research Cooperative (CERC); and Linda Scott, CERC Senior Research Associate, worked collaboratively with a team of colleagues, including Linda Childress from the Riverside County Office of Education, Jane Smith from the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools Office, and with California State University, San Bernardino School of Education faculty professors Lynne Díaz-Rico and Ruth Sandlin to develop and write the successful proposal. Pamela Post and Larry Smith, project teachers, are teachers on leave from their classrooms and work directly with mentors and beginning teachers in the project.

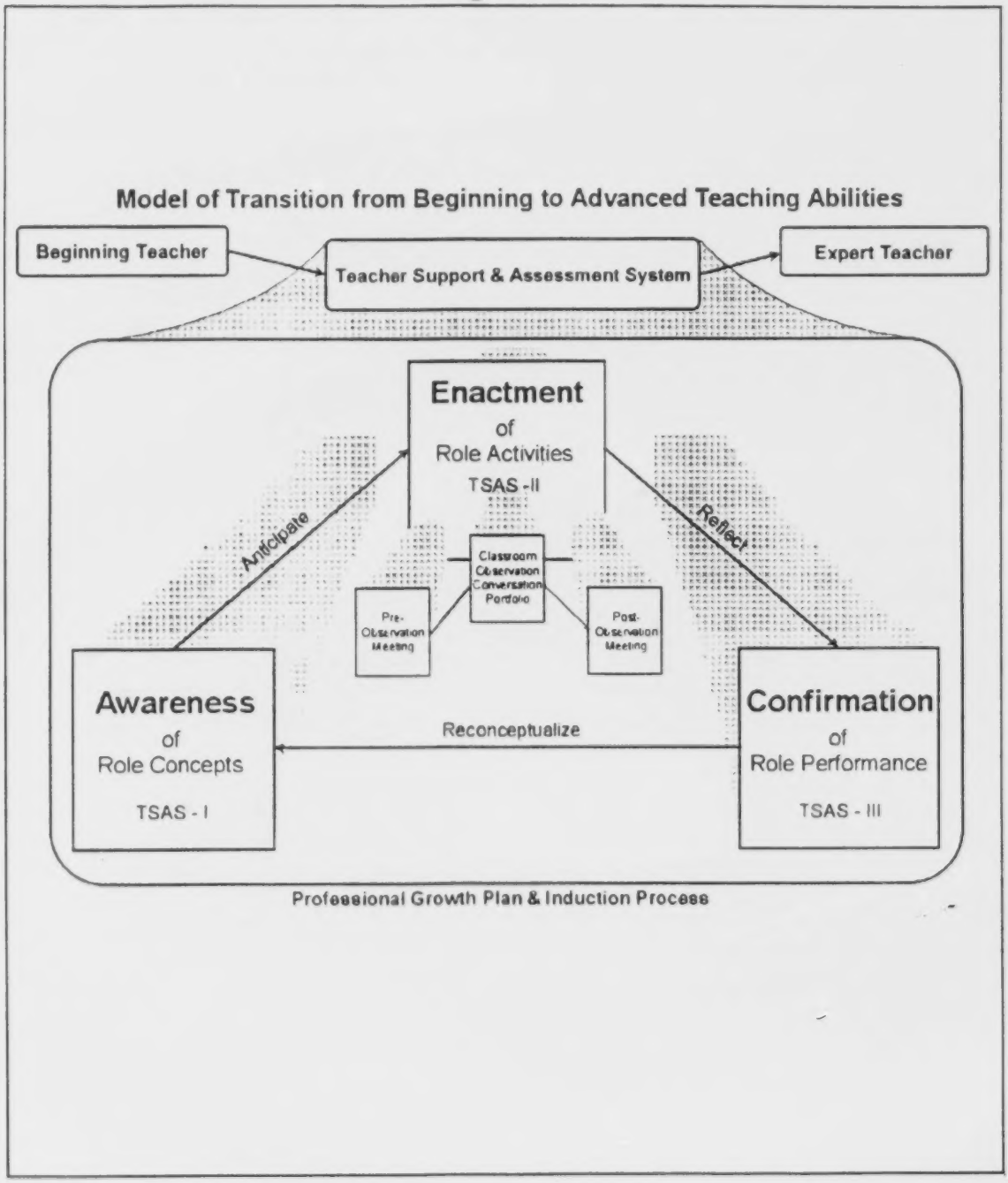
Using an assessment program for which the conceptual design and instrumentation was developed by the project team, formative and summative measures of a beginning teacher's professional development from beginner to expert status are provided. In addition, the project team participates in the development and implementation of professional support activities for the beginning teachers.

> *. . . Intensive professional development and assessment are necessary to build on the preparation that precedes initial certification, to transform academic preparation into practical success in the classroom, to retain greater numbers of capable beginning teachers, and to remove novices who show little promise as teachers.*
>
> -California Bergeson Act, 1992

The Conceptual Model. The IE-BTSA Project is grounded in a cognitive model of how beginning teachers move from novice to expert teaching. It was conceived and designed to simultaneously assess and support the work of beginning teachers; i.e., those who have already attained preliminary certification and have been found to possess at least entry level professional competence as a result of their pre-service teacher education programs, as described by the *Continuum of Skills, Knowledge and Attitudes from Beginning to Advanced Levels of Teaching* (California Department of Education, 1992). The IE-BTSA is articulated with the *Framework of Knowledge, Skills and Abilities for Beginning Teachers in California* (Far West Laboratories, 1992) through its identification of teacher roles and role tasks. By focusing on five expert teacher roles, we are also seriously attending to the important place in teacher development of the social system of classrooms and the social system of the school, not only on technical aspects of the teaching and learning act. Furthermore, our subject-matter focus is tied directly to the relevant California subject frameworks as opposed to vague notions of content knowledge.

Five expert teacher roles are identified as the foundation for the cognitive appropriation of concepts of good teaching. The expert teacher roles are : **Organizer, Instructor, Learner, Mentor and Colleague**. The comprehension, enactment and confirmation of these roles are cyclical in nature and recur during the support and assessment process. A model of the Teacher Support and Assessment System (TSAS I, II and III) is shown in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1



The TSAS model is a developmental consensus model, designed to empower beginning teachers to take possession of their own learning and professional development from beginning to expert knowledge, and one in which mentor and mentee are engaged in a collegial trust relationship.

In order to validate the expert teacher roles that should be given the highest priority in a program of support and assessment for new teachers, the IE-BTSA staff drew upon the advice and assistance of university and school-based teachers who have substantial experience in supporting and supervising pre-service and beginning teachers. A total of 74 university teacher supervisors, school district supervising teachers and school district curriculum administrators were asked to review a list of 20 role descriptions, and to indicate what level of importance, on a scale of 1 to 5, they believe should be assigned to each in the preparation and induction of beginning teachers. After submitting the survey results to statistical analyses, the five roles and the role descriptors that operationalize each role were established. They are shown on the following page in Figure 2, the *IE-BTSA Summary Matrix*.

It should be noted that the summary matrix is used to record a beginning teacher's progress through awareness, enactment and confirmation of the teaching roles.

Through an integrated system of support and assessment, IE-BTSA provides an array of professional development opportunities to beginning teachers. These opportunities include, but are not limited to:

- Seminars for professional growth
- Collaborative professional development planning
- Support in crafting knowledge from beginner to expert levels of teaching
- Growth in five teaching roles: Organizer, Instructor, Learner, Mentor, Colleague
- Reflective practice through a shared support and assessment system
- Creating and celebrating a personal Record of Teaching Success
- Formal and informal mentoring for curriculum planning and classroom practice

Assessment Component. A range of assessment systems is utilized to move beginning teachers through a cognitive cycle of awareness-enactment-confirmation in which awareness of the role aspects guides actions, the effectiveness of which are then confirmed or rejected. This Teacher Support and Assessment System (TSAS) directly measures the level of role attainment in a three-level process. First, the mentor teacher interviews the beginning teacher using a structured format that documents the beginning teacher's role awareness. Second, the mentor teacher visits the beginning teacher's classroom to observe and record enactment of role awareness. Together the beginning teacher and mentor create a professional growth plan (the PGP) for enacting increasing awareness and skill within enactment in each of the five roles. In addition to the classroom observation instrument, role enactment is assessed by the beginning teacher's ability to plan lessons and dialogue with other beginning teachers during the professional development seminars. Finally, the mentor and beginning teacher together review the assessment evidence to confirm the attainment of the professional roles. During this process the assessment is fully integrated with support and guides the mentor teachers in communicating strategies

Figure 2
INLAND EMPIRE BEGINNING TEACHER SUPPORT AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAM
TEACHER ROLES: ASSESSMENT AND SUPPORT SUMMARY MATRIX

Mentor_____ Teacher_____

Role Indicators	TSAS-I Assessment of Role Awareness			TSAS-II Assessment of Role Enactment			TSAS-III Assmt of Role Confirmation	
KEY: NE=*Not Evident*; A=*Apparent*; VE=*Very Evident*	NE	A	VE	NE	A	VE	Mntr	Tchr
Organizer								
1(a) Setting and communicating long range plans (P_1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
1(b) Organizing procedures/routines/environment (O)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
1(c) Grouping for maximum student engagement (O)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
1(d) Promoting positive climate and discipline (O)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
1(e) Creating teamwork and/or resolving conflicts (O)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Instructor								
2(a) Setting objectives and sequencing instruction (O)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
2(b) Involving stus.' background,inter &prior know. (O)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
2(c) Teaching with variety (O)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
2(d) Responding to diversity with range of activities (O)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
2(e) Assessing progress and re-planning (P_1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Professional Learner								
3(a) Acquiring and applying know. in content areas (P_1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
3(b) Acquiring new pedagogical concepts and lang. (IC)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
3(c) Framing and grappling with complex issues (IC)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
3(d) Connecting content to students' exper. & level (P_1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
3(e) Acquiring know. re. diverse stu. characteristics (IC)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Mentor to Students								
4(a) Assessing students' skills & providing mediation (O)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
4(b) Adjusting instructional sequence for indiv.needs (O)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
4(c) Modifying teacher speech with ling. div. stus. (O)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
4(d) Building lessons compatible with stus' cultures (P_2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
4(e) Developing stus' creativity, prob. solving, c.t. (P_2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Colleague								
5(a) Collaborating with colleagues to solve probs. (IC)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
5(b) Providing service to school and colleagues (P_2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
5(c) Drawing on community to enrich classroom (P_2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
5(d) Mobilizing and sharing resources (P_2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
5(e) Enlisting parental support (P_2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○0 ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○0
○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○0 ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○0

for professional improvement. Support and Assessment mentors participate in a five day support and assessment training as well as eight day- long seminars during the year. Seminars are based on Beginning Teachers' needs as they emerge within the six domains of the *Framework of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities for Beginning Teachers*.

Support Component. Each participating district in the consortium has formed mentor-beginning teacher teams in multiples of 1:3 or 1:4. All beginning teachers receive one half-day group support session per month and are released from classrooms to visit the classroom of the mentor or to work on portfolio-based activities during a second half-day per month. Districts have selected first-year beginning teachers to participate who are in culturally diverse classrooms. The mentors have previous experience as mentor teachers and have taught in multicultural classrooms. Mentors are totally dedicated to the program and utilize all mentor hours for support and assessment activities with their assigned new teacher. Support and Assessment mentors work directly with cluster coordinators assigned to the program as well as site administrators and the IE-BTSA Program Director.

The school site administrator, in a non-evaluative role, is a critical part of the IE- BTSA direct support team consisting of the beginning teacher, mentor teacher and the project teacher. Through his or her administrative expertise, this team member acts as liaison to the participating district office and facilitates vital communications and appropriate school-level procedures for all project participants. ***There is no connection between IE-BTSA support and assessment activities and district evaluation of a beginning teacher's performance***. All information and data gathered by the project is completely confidential.

Evaluation Component. There are five components of the evaluation study to be completed prior to the submission of a second year proposal for continuation funding. These include: 1) evaluation of the character and quality of implementation of the year one plan; 2) evaluation of the support and assessment instruments developed for IE- BTSA; 3) evaluation of the data system; 4) An evaluation of how well the conceptual and theoretical constructs developed in the IE-BTSA project are guiding project implementation and whether significant changes are warranted; 5) Impact analysis of support and assessment components. Qualitative data for this evaluation comes from the focus group interviews with program participants, and quantitative data comes from an assessment of the growth in beginning teacher acquisition of the roles and role indicators.

Implications. The objectives of the 'seamless web' of support and assessment from pre-service levels to the first years of teaching are to empower novices to acquire expert skills, and to improve the quality of instruction for students. First year teachers are easily overwhelmed by initial feelings of inadequacy, lack of confidence and low self- esteem. There is a painful newness to every experience, compounded by fear of the unknown, feelings of helplessness and personal problems such as illness and homesickness. These obstacles are not ameliorated by pre-service training alone, even when that training is thorough and of high quality. The IE-BTSA is a replicable model of beginning teacher support and assessment that can link the phases of teacher education, from novice to expert, throughout a teacher's career.

Local BTSA programs are among a wide array of teacher development initiatives underway in California. There are currently 30 of these programs operating statewide. As an intermediate agency, the Riverside County Office of Education has played an integral part in the linking of agencies and support efforts at all levels within the state of California. Acting as the Local Educational Agency, the county office has brought together and coordinated programs for New Teacher development programs and support within the Inland Empire which includes Riverside, Inyo, Mono and San Bernardino counties. The Office provides the centralized direction necessary for consistent delivery of services.

A principal purpose of local BTSA programs is to strengthen the transition from teacher education into professional teaching. The effectiveness of BTSA programs depends, in part, on their ties to other reforms in university preparation and in the professional development of all teachers. The Department of Education and the Commission on Teacher Credentialing therefore emphasize the importance of linking local BTSA programs to other state-funded initiatives such as the Comprehensive Teacher Education Institutes in colleges and universities and the Mentor Teacher Program in local education agencies. Such linkages add to the effectiveness of all efforts to improve schools, and they lead to the most cost-effective uses of public funds. Most local BTSA sponsors are building bridges between BTSA programs and other local efforts at professional development and school improvement. In the future, the two state agencies will give heightened emphasis to these linkages and bridges in further competitions for scarce BTSA dollars.

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STATEWIDE STRATEGIC PLANNING: IOWA'S AREA EDUCATION AGENCIES ARE ON THE JOURNEY

by
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Iowa's fifteen Area Education Agencies are implementing a statewide strategic plan. This unique opportunity and challenge provided more focus on specific statewide activities for all of the Area Education Agencies (AEAs). It provided a process for AEAs to become more proactive in determining the future directions of Iowa's educational service units.

The effort really began with discussions about the feasibility of statewide planning as a vehicle to promote thinking of the AEAs as one statewide system instead of fifteen totally independent agencies. A committee was appointed to discuss the issues and develop a plan of action. After the planning period, all of the AEA Chief Administrators voted to implement strategic planning.

The committee worked with the Cambridge Management Group to arrange for an external facilitator for the process. This external facilitator met with the planning committee to finalize the details of the effort. One of the planning committee members became the internal facilitator for the process.

The formal process began in November, 1991, when a statewide team of 33 individuals met to develop the components of the plan. The team members represented all facets of education in Iowa. The team included representation from each AEA, local schools, the Department of Education, education organizations, the State Board of Education, a Business-Labor-Education Roundtable representative and the Legislature.

The first planning session was a three-day meeting. Each of the specific plan's components was developed during this time. Team members focused on moving the AEAs into becoming change agents for education in Iowa. A particular focus was on working with local schools on change agendas the local schools identify.

One of the parts of the plan to be developed was the mission statement. It is a powerful statement as it indicates that AEAs will lead the transformation effort while emphasizing both excellence and equity. There is a strong commitment to serve clients, a term carefully chosen by the team. The mission emphasizes a cooperative network of AEAs. It also states that AEAs will lead. The eight belief statements emphasize the fundamental convictions, values and character of the statewide organization of AEAs.

The results of the first planning session were shared with a variety of constituents including the State Legislature and State Board of Education. The results of the planning effort were also widely distributed to a number of other groups.

The planning group identified ten strategies from which to implement action plans. Action planning teams were formed to develop the objectives and necessary steps to complete each of the strategies. In an effort to simplify the writing of the action plans, seven of the action teams were composed of representatives from a region of the state. Only three action teams had statewide representation. Each action team developed a specific plan to implement a specific strategy.

The second planning session was held in October, 1992. The action plan for each of the strategies was studied and approved during or shortly after the session.

After the second planning session, each AEA was asked to adopt the plan as was the Iowa Organization of Area Education Agency Boards' Executive Committee, which is composed of a Board representative from each AEA. At that point, the implementation procedure began.

The strategic planning process was a worthwhile process for us. It assisted in providing more focus in some specific areas as we work with local schools. It helped us to think of ourselves as a statewide system working together instead of 15 independent fiefdoms. It has led to more cooperative activities among AEAs in specific regions of the state. It helped us define a market niche.

Another big advantage of the planning effort has been for AEAs to coordinate and cross-walk our plan with the Department of Education's strategic plan. We are working with the Department to interface the two plans. The facilitator for each part of the AEA plan is coordinating our efforts with the facilitator of the Department's plan where parts of the two plans are similar and can be "crosswalked."

Both the Department of Education and AEAs have a part of the strategic plan which focuses on integrating and connecting school improvement in Iowa. The two groups are working closely together on this activity. This joint project defines essential learning expectations for students and addresses curriculum, assessment, and instruction. This and the other joint efforts have been very helpful.

Statewide strategic planning is very different from local school district strategic planning. Dr. Bill Cook was once quoted as saying statewide strategic planning is "like putting your arms around a cloud." It is much more difficult implementing a plan on a statewide basis, but it can be done. One of the difficult issues related to statewide planning is the on-going facilitation of the plan. It is much easier to facilitate it on an individual district basis. It is very similar to the concept of "proximity control": the closer something is to you, the easier it is to control.

Another more difficult issue is assuring commitment to the statewide plan. Individual AEAs at times will think that their local initiatives are more important and therefore they can lack commitment to statewide efforts. While this has not been a major problem, it has had an effect. Part of this problem seems to be that statewide efforts do require a different kind of commitment from people.

Budgeting for the plan has been an issue, but is one that seems to be resolved among the AEAs. It could become a major issue as costs of statewide initiatives escalate. At this time, the AEAs have agreed to a unified budgeting process which includes strategic planning activities. Costs for these statewide activities will be divided among AEAs. Fifty percent of the costs will be based on equal division among all AEAs and fifty percent will be divided among AEAs based on percentage of statewide population in each AEA.

Two of the issues related to budgeting are whether all AEAs will agree to participate in all of the strategic planning projects, or will be given the opportunity to "opt" out of specific projects and whether assessing strategic planning project costs to AEAs will take funding out of individual AEAs for these projects. Both issues have been discussed.

Overall, the acceptance of the AEA statewide strategic plan has been very positive. Progress has been made in implementing the action plans. Iowa's AEAs are thinking of themselves as one statewide system more than in the past. Cooperative efforts among AEAs are more common. A unified budget for strategic planning projects has been approved.

Each of the strategies is in the process of being implemented. Some strategies are further along than others. This, however, is very common among all strategic plans since strategic plans are typically five-year plans with parts implemented at different points in the five-year cycle. Examples of what has been done can best be demonstrated by reviewing some of the statewide activities.

Each AEA is cooperating with other AEAs in regional activities. Each of the groups of AEAs has identified specific projects which they can work on together. Staff development, cooperative purchasing, inservice efforts, and specific programs are all examples of cooperative activities.

The AEAs public relations statewide committee has assisted in statewide efforts as part of specific strategies and also general plan information. The committee published a brochure for statewide distribution which explains the plan. The committee is also implementing a project to develop an awareness of current and future societal issues which will impact education in the future.

An awareness of the need for schools to become involved in school transformation is being pursued through another strategy. Specific materials have been developed for this and are being distributed to all AEAs. These materials will be a way to communicate to local schools and the general public about the need for change and what is happening in society.

Another strategy is about fund raising through traditional and nontraditional sources. Part of this effort will involve grant writing for specific projects. Work on this strategy is proceeding.

Each AEA is or has developed an AEA team to focus on education transformation issues. These teams are and will continue to work with local schools on transformational issues which the local school identifies.

Progress is being made on other parts of the plan also.

Additionally, a periodic update of the strategic plan is scheduled for October 1995. At that time, planning team members will assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats which have impacted AEAs and the strategic plan since it was developed. Team members will also look forward to the next 18 months to speculate on issues which might affect the AEAs. Each current strategy will be reviewed and modified or changed as needed. This will also be an opportunity to develop new strategies to help AEAs determine their own future. Other parts of the plan will be revisited. This update will provide an excellent opportunity to review where we have been and to make "midcourse corrections" which the planning team thinks are needed. As many team members as possible that were on the original planning team will be asked to serve on the update team.

The insight and ideas articulated by Margaret Wheatley in her book *Leadership and the New Science* seem to be appropriate in the context of the statewide planning. She discusses such concepts as thinking about wholes instead of parts, seeing order within apparent chaos, and looking for patterns and order. She believes that leadership is at times messy, particularly in complex organizations. Her concepts seem to apply to planning on a statewide basis.

Our AEAs have been challenged by our statewide planning effort. We are making progress. This progress is very visible when you look at the whole of what we have accomplished since the beginning of our planning effort. The process of change is difficult but our planning is making a difference.

Iowa's Area Education Agencies accepted the challenge of statewide strategic planning. It is a successful and on-going effort to keep the AEAs in the forefront of the roles and expectations of educational service agencies.

EXHIBIT A

MISSION

The mission of Iowa Area Education Agencies is to lead the transformation of the early childhood, elementary, secondary educational system into universally recognized excellence by the year 2000, by providing quality equitable services which meet the needs of our clients through a cooperative network of innovative regional service centers.

EXHIBIT B

BELIEFS

We believe:

- Change is an opportunity for growth.
- The power of knowledge is in its application.

- Higher expectations yield higher results.
- All people can learn to unknown limits.
- All people need safe, loving, and nurturing environments to thrive.
- Every individual has equal inherent worth.
- Individuals need to be lifelong learners to be successful in a changing society.
- Partnerships based on mutual trust and understanding are essential for effective change.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES

by
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What are the most appropriate, productive, and viable roles of educational service agencies? That question is one with which we are all grappling in one form or another, and other groups seem to be more than willing to answer that question for us. There seems to some consensus that ESAs must play an enabling role in school improvement. A related question is: What kinds of organizational and governance arrangements create and sustain the most viable, stable, and productive ESAs?

Finding common answers to these questions for all ESAs is difficult, given our differences in structure, governance, function, and funding. Attempts to find answers points to the need for answering another three questions: Who owns us (the ESAs)? To do what? Why?

Issues of Ownership and their Effects

If ESAs are to be constructive mediators and facilitators of educational improvement, they must be seen as agencies which

- are in touch with the educators, schools, and districts they serve. They know the people, the state of practice, and the goals and needs of schools and districts.
- are skilled linkers, trainers, technical assistance providers, and resource providers.
- have a knowledge regarding high-impact practices which offer the promise of substantial improvement. They offer "images of the possible."
- are responsive to the educators, schools, and districts served in terms of timeliness, quality, and appropriateness of response.
- see their clients or customers to be the districts and schools they serve, not some external group or agency.
- build a program of services based on a common vision of what the ESA should be and do to achieve the quality the schools, districts, and communities desire.

Regardless of what procedure was used to establish the ESAs — whether ESAs are established and funded by the state, whether their areas or services and taxing authority are authorized by the state, or whether they are created by local action under state provisions which allow districts to form ESAs — the ESA must be psychologically, if not fiscally, "owned" by the districts served. The districts and their leaders must feel that the ESA is theirs and that ESA decisions, actions, and programs are responsive and accountable to the districts and their needs.

Given that fact, it is my firm belief that state action to establish ESAs as units responsible to the state, thereby making ESA staff direct state employees (usually the state department of education) with accountability of those employees to the state, is a mistake. Remote state agencies often fail to understand the culture and needs of districts and schools. Therefore, they mount mandates, programs, and initiatives which either do not address

specific school improvement needs or which draw time and energy away from locally initiated improvement initiatives. Further, many state agency personnel do not seem to fully understand either the change process or the concept of technical assistance. (There are two aspects to technical assistance in relation to state mandated initiatives: (1) assistance in complying with procedural regulations of the mandate and in meeting reporting requirements, and (2) assistance in successfully choosing, planning, and implementing changes in practice. State agency personnel tend to focus on the former and slight the latter.) When the external mandate occurs and when the actions of state agency personnel housed in ESAs seem to be less than responsive, those staff members (as state employees) are more likely to be seen as representatives of the state agency inflicting the external initiative on local schools and educators than to be seen as professionals whose focus is on responsive service to the local schools. It is seldom that real psychological ownership of the ESA occurs under those circumstances.

Viable Roles for ESAs

What, then, are the most viable and appropriate roles for ESAs? I believe that there are several answers. The ESA

1. does what member districts want and are willing to pay for.
2. takes care not to become so fragmented in focus and mission that it does nothing well.
3. must be entrepreneurial, seeking ways to generate programs which are needed and which can generate salable services and products, the proceeds from which can be used to underwrite other activities and operating costs.
4. should provide an on-line, readily accessible, locally-based infrastructure of support for school improvement characterized by responsiveness and quality service — one which builds district and school capacity by helping local schools and educators to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to successfully implement chosen changes in practice.
5. increases local district resources and time for leadership by (1) finding ways to save money by pooling (health insurance, cooperative purchasing, etc.) and (2) finding ways to decrease bureaucratic demands on overworked administrators wearing many hats.
6. seeks to establish and provide electronic and data networks which can aid in increasing curricular range, providing training and access to information and assistance, and networking (via electronic mail) between role-alikes across the service region. Such networks constitute a platform for so much else that a service agency can and should do.
7. seeks to help to develop and support visionary leadership (school board, superintendent, principal, and teacher leaders) which can help to create and sustain self-renewing, improvement-oriented cultures in our schools which become vision-driven learning communities.

Does that mean that ESAs should not house state programs or state employees? Not necessarily. In my perspective, housing of non-regulatory state programs or employees which do not interfere with the mission of the ESA or with its working relationships with schools or districts could be accepted, providing that the ESA gets something for it: funds which can partly underwrite locally defined services. Similarly, acceptance of projects

which accomplish something the state agency wants to do, but which do not impinge on the ESA or its service population is also acceptable, providing that (1) the added work load does not overload staff and (2) the ESA gets added funds for doing so.

The Issue of Funding

All of the major studies on school improvement indicate that an essential element for success is a locally-based, accessible and responsive infrastructure of support. A centralized, bureaucratic, distant organization cannot do the job. The logical candidate for this support role is the ESA. Does that mean that the state should fund ESAs? The answer to that question is, "Yes." "No." and "Maybe."

The "yes" answer is contingent upon the state's exercise of wisdom in allocating resources to ESAs without attempting to take control. That is, if the state will allocate resources for the specific purpose of mounting a locally-based and owned infrastructure of support of school improvement efforts of local schools and districts, the answer is "Yes." If the state uses the funding pretext to assume control over ESA functioning, the answer is "No". Further, there are questions as to whether it is appropriate for the state to fund the full operations of locally established and owned ESAs, or to fund operations which have little or nothing to do with the state. In between are many gray areas in which the answer is "maybe."

Stable funding is always a concern for the locally established and owned ESA. While absence of direct state funding makes life difficult at first, perhaps that is as it should be. If the ESA is able to establish a solid program of quality services which districts want and are willing to pay for, increased local funding is not uncommon. Further, if the ESA is able to establish a salable set of servoces and products which can generate revenue and is somewhat entrepreneurial in promoting its offerings, it can generate revenue, including grants which add to fiscal stability. With both ongoing local services and grants we have locally funded ESAs which are dynamic and fiscally sound, though only a portion of their funding comes from the state in the form of project or seed money.

Conclusion

ESAs have an important role to play in improving American public education. But they can only play that role well if they (1) seek to create a locally based, responsive, and quality infrastructure of support which empowers and enables local schools and educators to create and sustain self-renewing learning communities, (2) seek to create local capacity, working ESAs out of some jobs because the local capacity to do it is now in place, and moving on to new functions or roles as local efforts move to a higher plan, (3) develop working relationships characterized by trust, credibility, responsiveness, and accessibility, and (4) are governed and "owned" by the districts, schools and educators they serve, and not open to external manipulation by state agency administrators or politicians.

PERSPECTIVES

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about

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INTRODUCTION

"Perspectives," AAESA's journal of research and opinion for and about educational service agencies (ESAs), has made it to a second edition. This is largely a tribute to the authors whose work is contained herein. The third edition, scheduled for September, 1997, awaits a continuing and growing volume of contributions from the membership. More about that momentarily.

Responses received by the AAESA Council to the first edition of this publication were almost universally favorable, especially about the concept of such a publication. That is understandable. There is no other readily accessible forum for service agency personnel to read about the contributions and achievements of such entities around the country. AAESA had to, and did, create a vehicle for such information sharing. This second edition attends to several key issues:

- Bruce Hunter, executive director of AAESA, reflects from a national perspective on several important issues and trends that are impacting, or likely to impact, education in general and service agencies in particular over the next few years. Two of these issues are the growing focus on results and the adequacy of funding and the competition for dollars.

- Bob Stephens and Hobart Harmon support Bruce Hunter's arguments as they investigate what efforts have been made by educational service agencies around the country, either at their own initiative or as part of a state study, to document the cost effectiveness and cost efficiencies of service agency delivery systems. They offer suggestions for methodologies to conduct such studies. This well researched and thorough analysis can be considered required reading for service agency leaders.

- Ron Fielder, former member of the AAESA Council, guided the leadershipof AAESA through two strategic planning sessions so that AAESA could be positioned to provide assistance and support to member agencies as they strive to respond to the rapidly changing education environment in each state. He summarizes the results of these sessions and the plans of AAESA leadership in response to these sessions.

- J. Gary Hayden demonstrates how a state level strategic planning process is leading to a better integration of service agency efforts through voluntary cooperation and collaboration.

- Nick Timmer describes one service agency's attempt to respond to one of the newest challenges/opportunities on the education landscape - charter schools. Failing to provide support to charter schools in Michigan risked angering the governor, who was aggressively supporting this concept and who controlled significant funding for service agencies. Responding too quickly and enthusiastically to requests from charter schools meant possibly angering constituent school districts and their boards, who elected the board of education of the intermediate unit. What would your agency do if confronted by such a challenge?

- Other articles of opinion define the contemporary challenges faced by ESAs in Texas (Noah Sessions), Minnesota (Jasmine Chase), Iowa (Gary Hayden) and Pennsylvania (Rose Stellman).

The role and cost efficiencies of ESAs seem perennially under question in one or more states. Texas, New York, and Nebraska are but three recent examples of such analyses. To a large extent the federal government seems oblivious to the role and function of ESAs in the thirty or so states in which such entities exist. The Department of Education's 15 new technical assistance centers are intended to be one-stop regional shopping centers to assist local school districts with reform but appear to have no designed responsibility to work with service agencies where they exist though most agencies would consider such a mission one of their own top priorities.

"Perspectives" is designed to tell the ESA story - to policy makers, legislators, and each other. Only those institutions that are considered valuable are deemed worthy of continued analysis, study, and constructive commentary and criticism. We owe it to the future of ESAs to take ourselves seriously. We need more scholarship about ESAs similar to the work of Bob Stephens, Craig Stanley, Hobart Harmon, Glen Shaw and those others who have written masters and doctoral studies about one or more functions of service agencies. We need more essays that describe contemporary challenges to ESAs. We need to hear about what works; it may be just as important to hear anecdotes about what didn't work.

You do not have to be an experienced author to write for "Perspectives." If you have an important story to tell, don't be held back about a concern about your writing ability. There are undoubtedly individuals in your own agency who can be of assistance. Even if there aren't, send us a manuscript and we'll do our best to help you put it in a final form for publication. The only manuscript that discourages us is the one we don't receive.

Our plans for the future of "Perspectives" include a state by state update of political and legislative events affecting ESAs in each issue. Hopefully in the next year or so AAESA can consider moving to a twice a year publication schedule.

We will also continue to encourage members to interview state leaders about their visions of the role of service agencies in the future. We must be proactive about our mission and functions, or we will inevitably find ourselves needing to be reactive. It has become clear that once a good idea or a bad idea, even a bad idea such as reducing or eliminating the roles and functions of ESAs, gets started in one state, it can spread quickly to other states.

Please send your ideas and suggestions for making "Perspectives" a quality publication to me at 538 O'Dowd Hall, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan 48309-4401 or contact your regional AAESA Council representative. Send manuscripts to that address also. We're accepting them now.

Bill Keane
Editor

THE POLITICS OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES: 1996-2000

by
Bruce Hunter
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The future of educational service agencies (ESAs) directly relates to the future of public education, and faces the same political tumult and confounding socio-economic and demographic and political forces. While the challenges are great, a number of trends bode well for service agencies.

Public education, including educational service agencies, has reached a watershed where the old ways and practices are not adequate to meet future needs, but new methods, structures, and directions are not yet clear. Thomas Kuhn, in his seminal work, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, said that when the old theories don't hold up, new theories will emerge, and that the new theories will enable us to see the world in completely new ways. But during this period, scientists are caught between current and future theories and paradigms in a period of uncertainty.

Like scientists at the time of Copernicus, leaders in public education are caught between old and new paradigms regarding the social role of education and the possibilities for student learning. As Kuhn pointed out, the time it takes for people to see the world through a new lens may look short in textbooks, but frequently takes years and even decades, and in the case of Copernicus, almost two centuries. This is likely to be of little comfort to ESAs administrators who, along with their colleagues in school districts, are likely to be in the maelstrom of rethinking and redesigning public education for several years, and perhaps decades.

The changing beliefs and theories in education, coupled with a need to reduce costs, have resulted in state legislatures reexamining the need for ESAs. However, at the same time, other states have turned to ESAs to help improve public education.

The paradigm shift centers on the dream of a quality education for every child that levels life chances and opportunities. Learning theory holds that all children, not just a few, can learn a good deal more than previously suspected. The notion of success for all makes it seem within our grasp to provide a much more complete education for every child. A corollary of the discovery that every child can learn a good deal more is that the time and cost of achieving high outcomes for every child varies greatly, and we must determine whether the society has the will to make that investment.

As a result of the watershed shifting of social and educational paradigms, the role, function, funding and even the very existence of ESAs, along with the rest of public education, are being questioned. For example, ESAs in Nebraska, Pennsylvania and New York have been threatened with deep funding cuts or fundamental changes in their funding base. Additionally, the mission and funding of ESAs in Texas, Oregon and Minnesota have been the subject of study by state legislatures or blue ribbon

commissions. Illinois and Ohio are in the process of dramatically reinventing the role and structure of ESAs. And in Iowa, where there was no formal action, there was brief but serious talk of eliminating ESAs.

Accompanying the paradigm shift is a growing competition for public funds caused by an aging population, rising health care costs, and increasing concern about crime. The competition for public funds makes trimming costs and achieving greater efficiency the short term goal of every legislative body. Thus, the principal motivation for changing the role, function and funding of ESAs seems to be cutting education spending rather than increasing learning. In fact, only Texas seems to have actually looked at ESAs as part of a strategy for improving schools rather than cutting budgets.

Chaos theory tells us that if we look carefully into seemingly unrelated events, such as all the different education reform efforts, we may find a new, unexpected picture that explains what we have seen and which can predict future events. The trick is to look for new relationships and links, rather than applying our existing frames to understand today and predict tomorrow.

Education reform certainly appears chaotic, but nine related trends seem to be occurring widely. These changes indicate an emerging consensus among politicians and educators about the methods of achieving the mission of providing a high quality education based on clear targets for every child.

MAJOR TRENDS IN EDUCATIONAL REFORM

The driving force for change in education is a new, sharper focus on results. Reform rhetoric often uses the term "standards," but the meaning is results. The results expected by consumers of our students are student achievement at new high targets established by local, state or national authorities. Historically, public schools have focused more on process than results. For example, we have counted courses taken or participation in activities as measures of success. ESAs have also focused on process and counted teachers and administrators attending programs and time spent in training as success. The new paradigm requires assessing the contribution of ESA's to student achievement and ultimately judging ESAs, schools, school districts and teachers by student achievement.

Current management and organizational theory holds that decisions should be decentralized to attain improvements only apparent to those doing the work. To that end decentralization has become a major feature of plans to improve public education. Decentralization, which is occurring everywhere either by local or statewide policy, usually involves some sort of a site council or advisory group. ESAs cannot stand apart from this movement. ESAs have provided services to school districts based on the plans of senior central administrators in school districts. In a more decentralized model, ESAs may well provide services based on the needs and plans of school site councils or individual teachers.

A third related change in organizational development is the conviction that improvement is determined by measures of student achievement. In keeping with the past emphasis on process over results, data about education programs have generally described participation rather than the process, and seldom described the connection between processes and outcomes. Our current achievement information does not come close to meeting the needs of students, parents, teachers, administrators and policy makers for information, so there is great emphasis of new methods and new measures. In some states such as Washington, ESAs are charged with maintaining the infrastructure for implementing the new state wide assessment system, including staff development and technical assistance.

Anthony Carnevale, in his recent work America and the New Economy, pointed out that success in the new economy requires a customized product line. In education, the principle of customization has been called choice. Unfortunately, choice is often a code word for vouchers. By any measure, parents and students have many more choices of instructional settings and curriculum than they did 10-15 years ago. And, the choices are not all in urban areas. Rural schools also offer new choices through distance learning and cooperatives. Educational service agencies in a number of states such as Michigan have authorized charter schools, and in Connecticut, an ESA obtained a magnet school grant for a region. For customization to be a reality, ESAs must participate to a much greater extent.

The hottest new trend is a concern for the transition from school to work. Historically schools have been focused on college bound students. However, business leaders feel that apprenticeship systems give competitor nations a leg up on American business. These business leaders have found that their desire meshes well with the new desire to educate every student to higher levels. Because most high schools are so small, and because there are few business training opportunities outside of large metropolitan areas, ESAs are likely to be deeply involved in the new school to work transition efforts. This is a natural outgrowth of work already being done in vocational education for states such as New York where the BOCES already do much vocational training.

A fifth trend in the reformation of public education is the increasing reliance on technology as a teaching and management tool. Computers and improved telecommunication have created opportunities for individual study and much greater depth of inquiry and projects. As important, computers and telecommunications permit smooth operation of schools that are decentralized and offer more choices to students. Technology has turned out to be a major focus for ESAs in nearly every state. ESAs provide many services in technology such as network management, technical assistance and support, staff development and even computer repair.

As the social and educational expectations for schools grow, funding has become much more contentious based on the forces discussed earlier. In the midst of the fierce competition for public funds, school leaders are rightly asking for adequate funding to accomplish the new mission. The outcome of the concern with meeting the new expectations has been a new focus on adequacy of funding rather than equal funding per student. Adequacy of funding addresses the differences in what is required to adequately educate students in different contexts with different needs.

Finance litigation to provide adequate education has not involved ESAs to this date, but it seems inevitable.

A change trend honored more in rhetoric than reality is the need for a much improved research and development capacity. A new report by the Consortium on Productivity in Education remarked on the dismal state of research and development in education. Among the observations of the consortium were that much less is spent on R & D in education than other areas of government, and that R & D in education is quite removed from the classroom. ESAs in the Midwest have been particularly active with the North Central Regional Educational Lab to link teachers and administrators to research and new practices emerging from that research.

And, finally, successful change requires a massive commitment to staff development. Unlike their counterparts in business, educators expect changes in performance with no training to assist workers to acquire new skills and knowledge. The commitment to staff development is so small in education that it is not generally among the line items listed in school budgets, and therefore no data are available about how much schools spend helping teachers, administrators and others learn new skills to change their practices. However, in most states the clearest trend in staff development is the large role for ESAs in planning and providing the training.

THE CHALLENGE FOR ESAS

The challenge for leaders in education service agencies is to show how ESAs can assist schools to accomplish the mission of bringing every student to high levels of achievement, cost effectively. Recognizing the need to focus ESAs on student achievement, several years ago the AAESA Executive Council invited then Texas Commissioner of Education in Texas, Lionel (Skip) Meno, to address the Fall Conference on his plans to focus ESAs on assisting schools to increase student achievement. The Executive Council then invited Dr. Meno back for three of the following four years to discuss how things were going. That focus on the role of ESAs in achieving the new mission was precisely what will be required of ESA's in the future. ESA leaders must follow Dr. Meno's example in explaining the role of ESAs in term of improving student achievement efficiently.

In such critical areas as technology and staff development, schools are depending heavily on ESAs in nearly every state. And as states reconsider the role, function and funding of ESAs as was done in Texas recently, ESAs became an integral part of the plan to increase student achievement.

Phil Schlechty, of the Center on Leadership in Education Reform, provides a metaphor for school improvement that deserves consideration by embattled ESA leaders. Schlechty's metaphor concerns huge building projects such as skyscrapers, bridges or dams where the first several months or years are taken not in building the desired structure, but in creating the infrastructure that facilitates timely, high quality construction. Thus roads to the site, storage facilities for tools and supplies and stockpiles of supplies are attended to first. Only after the infrastructure is completed does construction start. Without the infrastructure, the construction will not be of desired quality or be finished on schedule.

No doubt exists that public education, including ESAs, must change to meet the challenge of the times. But careful examination of how to accomplish the desired changes leads to the conclusion the most school districts lack the infrastructure to achieve better results. Educational infrastructure includes several generally invisible capacities, such as the capacity for staff development, the capacity to apply new research to teaching and organizing education, and the capacity to make maximal use of technology, all of which are purposes for many ESAs.

Most school districts lack the needed infrastructure for improvement because they are too small and they lack adequate funding. Sixty-seven percent of school districts enroll 2,500 or fewer students and most of those school districts enroll fewer than 1,000 students. The small size of most school districts means generally that the non-teaching professional staff consists of the superintendent and one, two or three principals.

State legislatures must either construct a new infrastructure or use the existing ESA system. Beyond the need for school improvement infrastructure, schools need assistance in selecting instructional strategies and curriculum changes to achieve the goal of bringing all students to achieve new educational targets.

Part of making the case for ESAs depends on an economic argument based on increased efficiency from joint or cooperative projects. Cost is a continuing concern for all public agencies because the cumulative federal, state, local tax bite is 50 percent or more of most incomes. And, according to the Census Bureau, the income of most Americans has stagnated or declined over the last two decades. So taxes are higher than in the past, and many people actually have lower incomes.

Making a case based on cost is a two-edged sword because maintaining an infrastructure will have cost implications, but costs for needed services provided in satisfactory fashion are not seen as extra or too high. The trick is to exceed the customer expectations. When customers are satisfied, the cost of maintaining an ESA may appear to be affordable. However, when the ESA is seen as another layer of administration the cost may be too high.

There are several complications for service agencies that could work for or against them when legislatures and governors are considering how to improve student achievement at the lowest cost. The greatest complication may well be the unexpected growth of student enrollment. Enrollment growth will put greater cost pressure on taxpayers. According the U.S. Department of Education, enrollment is projected to rise about 15 percent in the next seven years. Another complication for improving schools is the growth in the number of students who have special needs and are more expensive to bring to high levels of achievement.

When enrollment and the number and percentage of high cost students are growing, policy makers must look for efficiencies and savings. ESAs must be seen as necessary to those directly engaged in increasing student achievement, but they must also be a vehicle for reducing costs.

Perhaps the greatest structural problem for educators in meeting the challenges of the new century is the lack of infrastructure to accomplish needed changes. Educational service agencies are the least expensive, most readily available infrastructure available. Other sources of educational infrastructure, colleges and universities, have a different mission and are difficult for schools to access as are the federally funded regional labs and centers. The labs and centers provide some help, but cover several states. Meeting the future challenge requires cooperative ventures that are keyed to meeting the needs of teachers and principals in a convenient, timely low cost fashion.

Educational service agencies are an institution whose time has come. And, if ESAs didn't exist they would have to be invented.

COST-ANALYSIS STUDIES OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES OF STATE NETWORKS OF ESAS

by
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INTRODUCTION

It is well established that great diversity characterizes the governance, structure, and organizational features of educational service agency types of organizations (ESAs) in the several states where units of this type have been created either by statute, by state administrative action, or by voluntary steps taken by local school districts. Differences of these kind are in large part reflections of the dominant political traditions and professional norms present in a state, or substate region of a state.

It is also true, however, that there are common expectations of what is hoped will be gained by the creation of a statewide network or individual service agency. While the mission statements of many ESAs include multiple aspirations of what is intended, one goal in particular appears to be almost universally expressed. Although the language used may differ, the vision of supporters of the concept of regional educational service agencies clearly gives prominence in their mission statements to the anticipation that a service agency will be able to provide many programs and services to local school districts with greater efficiency and effectiveness than if a local system were to attempt to provide these when acting along. Thus, efficiency and economy are, if not the raison d'etre for a service agency in the minds of many, perceived as first among equal goals.[1]

The assumption made by state and local planners and decision makers that some programs and services can be more efficiently and economically offered by a regional service agency serving a collection of local districts has substantial face validity. It would not seem to be too difficult to use economic rationality to argue, for example, that programs that require substantial staff expertise (as in the case of curriculum development), or those that are characterized by the need to create a critical mass (as in the case of services for disabled students) can be better accomplished in many situations when provided by multiple districts rather than on an individual district basis.

The current environment surrounding public education, however, would seem to require more than the unchallenged acceptance of the face validity of this line of argument. Clearly the movement to downsize government, the accelerating financial pressures on the public sector generally and on public education in particular, and the push for greater accountability all require that an ESA, or statewide system of ESAs, document the economic benefits of their continued operation in more sophisticated ways than was perhaps true in the past.

Conversely, and importantly, this same climate also offers supporters of the concept of an educational service agency what is perhaps an unmatched opportunity to demonstrate that a greater commitment to what they attempt to accomplish would be a wise public policy choice (not only on the basis of economic rationality, but technical, social, and legal rationality as well).

OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

The objective of this paper is to describe and compare the design features used in recent statewide cost analysis exercises that examine the programs and services of educational service agency-type organizations.

PROCEDURES USED

Presented below is a discussion of the procedures used to collect potential cost analysis studies for use in developing a comparative profile, the criteria used to select those retained for developing the profile, and a brief description of a number of guidelines that are used to organize the comparison.

IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL STUDIES

A number of steps were utilized to identify potential cost analysis studies. The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) system was examined using a number of key describers that might capture the possible varieties of cost analysis (e.g., cost-benefit, cost-effectiveness, cost-efficiency, cost-utility, cost-savings), as were recent issues of Dissertation Abstracts. Also, a review was done of the state data coordinators first report in efforts begun in 1994-95 by the American Association of Educational Service Agencies (AAESA) to put in place a comprehensive national data system. The AAESA is the single national professional association devoted exclusively to promoting the interests of educational service agency-type organizations, in part by providing a clearinghouse on promising practices in the organization and programming practices of its membership. One item asked the state data coordinators whether a cost-analysis study of the ESAs was completed in their state in recent years. These efforts resulted in the identification of 19 cost-analysis studies, divided approximately equally between statewide and individual ESA-sponsored activities.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Five statewide studies were used in the comparative profile. These were selected for inclusion for one or more of the following reasons: they were judged to be the best of the statewide efforts; they represented different design approaches; or, they were completed within the past five years, the time period viewed to be appropriate for identifying the state-of-the-art.

The individual ESA cost studies uncovered in the search for potential candidates are excluded from the comparative profile primarily because of a concern that their inclusion would bias the results. It is true that the guidelines used to organize the profile are applicable to the conduct of a cost analysis study regardless of level, state or individual ESA. It is also true, however, that the conduct of a statewide study is clearly much more complex than one that uses a single organizational entity as the unit of analysis. One would expect, then, individual ESA sponsored studies to be more comprehensive than those of the first-generation of statewide studies that were identified. The fact that only a few of the individual ESA studies reviewed here proved to be comprehensive does not lessen the concern being raised. Thus, while the exclusion of the individual ESA efforts substantially reduces the number of studies included in the comparative profile, this step nonetheless was taken to add validity to the comparison. Use is made, however, of some of the insights gained from an examination of individual ESA studies in other portions of this report.

Selected features of the five statewide studies used in the comparative profile are presented in Table 1. The identities of the states are withheld.

TABLE 1
SELECTED FEATURES OF COST ANALYSIS STUDIES INCLUDED IN THE REPORT

State	Study Period	Sponsorship	Conducted by	Reported Type of Cost Analysis Undertaken
A	1992-93	ESA executive directors	same	cost-savings
B	1992-93	state association of ESAs	private firm	cost-efficiency
C	1993-94	state legislature	state government agency	cost-effectiveness
D	1991-92	state association of ESAs	same	cost-effectiveness & cost-savings
E	1995	ESA executive directors	same	value-added

MAJOR DESIGN FEATURES USED TO ORGANIZE THE COMPARATIVE PROFILE

Tsang (1988) expressed the position of many with his comment that "given the wide range of applications of cost analysis, it is impossible to specify fully the data needs of cost analysis" (p. 223). He could well have been also referring to the wide range of

applications of cost analysis studies undertaken in the five states included in the comparative profile.

Nonetheless, the profile that follows will be organized around 11 design features. These features, in our judgment, ought to be considered for inclusion in a report that is intended to serve as a document to inform both the policy and research communities at the state and local levels and the public about the investment in the state network of educational service agencies.

It is our position, then, that the design features used in the profile represent the minimal expectations of a cost analysis study that purportedly addresses the cost-efficiency of delivering programs/services through an ESA, as opposed to some other option. Cost-efficiency studies ask whether or not a program/service is being produced at the least cost, and nothing more. All of the five state reports included in the profile pursued this same goal, though terms other than cost-efficiency were often used to label the exercises (with cost-savings being the most popular).

The 11 design features are shown in Table 2, along with their origin, and are of two types:

(1) they reflect a consensus of the design requirements of a cost-efficiency study; or,
(2) they reflect our judgment of design features of a report of a cost-analysis study of the type most likely to enjoy maximum acceptance and impact in the policy communities at the state and local levels.[2]

A brief discussion of each design feature is presented below.

1. Revenue and Expenditure Structures Established. The revenue and expenditure structures of the ESAs must be established. These should follow accepted budgetary practices for any educational organization, that, as Thompson, Wood, and Honeyman (1994) argue, should facilitate designing the revenue and expenditure streams into both a legal and informational framework, and, we add, an evaluative framework as well. The increasing use by ESAs of computerized accounting systems that, among other benefits, can readily establish cost centers for the subsequent determination of the operating costs associated with each program/service will facilitate this step.

   Accounting for state and (especially, at this time) federal revenues raises an issue that must be addressed in other phases of the cost-efficiency study. A decision must be made on revenues received here that are not specifically designated as available only to the ESAs. ESAs typically receive external funding because they serve multiple local districts and the funding agency has determined that this arrangement best serves the funding agency's goals. In other cases, ESAs typically receive external funding without stipulations of this type. A decision will need to be made on how these cases are to be accounted for. The choice made should be stated early on in the identification of the revenue structure.

2. Scope of Analysis Identified and Rationale Provided. The scope of programs/services included in the analysis should be identified, as should the rationale used in the selection process. At a minimum, all core programs/services offered by all

TABLE 2
RECOMMENDED MINIMAL DESIGN FEATURES OF A STATEWIDE COST-EFFICIENCY STUDY OF ESA PROGRAMS/SERVICES

Design Feature Included in Report	Origin of Design Feature: Consensus Requirement of a Cost Analysis Study of This Type	Origin of Design Feature: Judgment of the Authors
1. Revenue structure and the expenditure structure of the ESAs are established.	X	X
2. Scope of programs/services included in report are clarified and rationale for selection stated.	X	X
3. Total operating costs for each program/service are established.	X	
4. Costs to clients to obtain each program/service are established.	X	
5. Costs to clients for each program/service if obtained other than from ESAs are established.	X	
6. Dollar benefits of dollar savings to clients for each program/service are established.	X	
7. Dollar benefits of dollar savings to clients for all program/services are established.	X	
8. Cost-efficiency of each program/service is established.	X	
9. Cost-efficiency of all progrmas/services is established.	X	
10. Non-quantifiable benefits to clients and to the state's system of elementary-secondary education are identified.		X
11. Quantifiable results of study are reported in both aggregate (state) and disaggregate (individual ESA, individual LEA, individual student) forms.	X (aggregate)	X (disaggregate)

of the service agencies in the state network should be included, especially those central to the mission of the ESAs. That is, the study should include efforts by the state network intended to enhance the cost-efficiency of providing equity and quality in the state's system of elementary-secondary education, the two presumed overarching goals of most ESAs. Further, the study is likely to be perceived as especially valuable if it focuses on areas directly related to teaching and learning, the centerpieces of much of the current school improvement agenda.

3. Annual ESA Operating Costs for Each Program/Service Established. The total annual operating costs for each program/service included in the analysis, along with the value assigned each ingredient, must be established. One conventional way to organize operating costs is to place them into one of four major categories:[3]

   (a) personnel - total salary and fringe benefits reduced to a common figure (e.g., hourly rate, daily rate), and prorated to reflect time devoted to activity[4]

(b) facilities - actual costs for rented or leased space, or the fixed asset replacement costs for owned facilities, both prorated to reflect space devoted to activity

(c) equipment and supplies - all costs for equipment and supplies prorated to reflect those devoted to activity; include depreciation costs for capital equipment, again prorated to reflect that devoted to activity

(d) other costs - all indirect costs to open the doors of an ESA and do business established, then prorated to each program/service (or cost center)

4. Costs to Clients to Obtain Each Program/Service Established. The costs to clients to obtain the ESA-sponsored program/service must be established. Client costs include (a) their direct costs to participate, if any, (e.g., membership fees, special assessments); and, (b) other costs borne by clients in order to participate (e.g., travel to an ESA staff development activity, costs for substitute teachers, electronic access costs).

5. Costs to Clients if Each Program/Service Obtained Other than ESAs. The actual costs to clients to obtain the same quality of program/service from another provider and the actual costs to clients if the client duplicates the program/service must be established. In situations where no other provider is available, then shadow pricing, estimates of an expert panel, and/or historical data can be used. These same procedures can be used to establish costs to clients if the program/service is duplicated by the client where estimates, not actual costs, need to be established.

   Where multiple providers are available, a decision needs to be made (and stated) whether to use the highest, average (our preference), or lowest costs in the calculations. We also support the position of one study completed by an individual ESA that adds what they refer to as a "coordinating factor," if appropriate, to both types of calculations - costs to obtain program/service from another provider, or duplicated by the client. This factor, where it is applied, was determined to be an appropriate percentage of the service agency's program salaries and other operating costs (Cost-Benefit Study, 1990-1991, 1992, p. 15).

6. Dollar Benefits or Dollar Savings for Each Program/Service Computed. This figure is computed by subtracting the costs to clients to obtain the program/service (the calculation in #4 above) from the costs to clients to obtain the program/service from another provider or duplicated by the client (the calculation in #5 above).

7. Dollar Benefits or Dollar Savings for All Programs/Services Computed. This figure is arrived at by aggregating the dollar benefits or dollar savings of each individual program/service.

8. Cost-Efficiency of Each Program/Service Established. This figure is the difference between the operating costs to the ESAs to offer a program/service (the computations in #3 above), and the costs to the client to obtain each program/service (the computations in #4 or #5 above).

9. Cost-Efficiency of All Programs/Services Established. This figure is the difference between the aggregate operating costs to the ESAs to offer all programs/services and the aggregate costs to clients to obtain all programs/ services.

10. Non-Quantifiable Benefits Cited. ESAs, as is true of virtually all educational enterprises in the public sector, make many important but not readily measurable contributions to the advancement of education. Moreover, many of their efforts, like those of other educational enterprises, make important contributions to the development of human capital, the increasingly acknowledged single greatest resource of this country. So, too, could a number of the programs/services of many ESAs be labeled as cost-avoidance, a benefit correctly highlighted in its 1990-91 report by the Pudget Sound Educational Service District in the state of Washington.

    It is argued here that it is appropriate to make reference to the non-quantifiable benefits that the programs and services make to students, to school districts and their staffs, and to the state's system of elementary-secondary education so long as references of this type are clearly labeled as such. Even the eminent economist Charles Benson (1968), in an early treatment of the attributes of a good cost-effectiveness study, acknowledged that "...while most of the work is quantitative in nature, it should frequently be supplemented by qualitative analysis" (p. 257).

    Unedited examples of the non-quantifiable benefits cited in both statewide and individual ESA cost studies are presented in Table 3 without comment.

TABLE 3
EXAMPLES OF NON-QUANTIFIABLE BENEFITS OF ESAS CITED IN COST ANALYSIS STUDIES[5]

Examples Cited
1. "provides leverage of limited resources"
2. "promotes administrative efficiency"
3. "provides affordability and access"
4. "personnel face-to-face services is important aspect of access and quality"
5. "the specialized role of ESAs provides flexibility"
6. "statewide coverage of services becomes available"
7. "alternative delivery not available in all areas of the state"
8. "provides professional networking"
9. "long-term benefits and cost-avoidance benefits for at-risk children and youth"
10. "assists in compliance with federal and state regulations"
11. "saves time for LEA staff in review of federal and state regulations"
12. "saves time for LEA staff in development of plans and policies"
13. "saves time for LEA staff in development of specifications for supplies and equipment"
14. "the training of trainers who then train local staff at no extra cost"
15. "state department works with only one reporting unit for special education"
16. "can put changes in place quickly"
17. "most districts would have to do without services, thus reducing quality of programs"
18. "lessons turnover and improves morale of LEA staff"
19. "ability and flexibility to tailor programs/services to community needs"
20. "links LEAs to state and national educational resources"
21. "serves as a liaison between LEAs, state offices, other agencies"

11. Quantifiable Results Reported in Aggregated and Disaggregated Form. Maximum benefit of the cost-analysis study would seem to be realized if the quantifiable results are reported in both an aggregate form (statewide), as well as in a disaggregated format (e.g., individual ESA and individual school district). Moreover, and importantly, doing so helps set the stage for other types of cost analysis studies other than the focus here on cost-efficiency.

Advantages of Recommended Design Features

Inclusion of the design features outlined here has advantages that make possible the identification and presentation of other terms that enjoy currency in the policy communities at both the state and local levels. The development of two popular concepts in particular, value-added and leverage-gain, are greatly facilitated.

TABLE 4
A COMPARISON OF THE DESIGN FEATURES OF STATEWIDE COST-EFFICIENCY STUDIES WITH THE RECOMMENDED DESIGN

Theme of Recommended Design Features	Statewide Study				
	A	B	C	D	E
1. revenue and expenditure structures identified	no	no	no	no	no
2. coverage of report					
a. scope	selected	selected	selected	selected	selected
b. rationale used in selection	yes	yes	no	no	no
3. total operating costs each program/service established					
a. personnel	selected	yes	no	no	no
b. facilities	selected	yes	no	no	no
c. equipment and supplies	selected	yes	no	no	no
d. other costs	selected	yes	no	no	no
4. costs to clients to obtain each program/service established					
a. direct costs to participate	selected	yes	no	no	yes
b. other costs to participate	selected	yes	no	no	no
5. costs to clients if each program/service obtained other than ESA established					
a. from another provider	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
b. duplicated by client	yes	yes	no	no	no
6. dollar benefits or dollar savings to clients for each program/service established	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
7. dollar benefits of dollar savings to clients for all programs/services established	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
8. cost-efficiency of each program/service established	no	yes	no	no	no
9. cost efficiency for all programs/services established	no	yes	no	no	no
10.non-quantifiable benefits established	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
11. quantifiable results established					
a. aggregate (state)	yes	no	no	yes	yes
b. dissaggregate (individual ESA, LEA, student)	no	no	no	ESA	ESA

Some of the cost-analysis studies we reviewed preferred to focus on what was referred to as the value-added benefits to clients as a result of their participation in an ESA program/service. That is, it was argued that where, for example, a client pays a

membership fee, then, as a result, the client multiplied this membership fee x times (the difference between the total operating costs of the ESA and the total costs to the client for all programs/services).[6]

Other cost-analysis studies we reviewed preferred to focus on what was referred to as the leverage-gain by clients as a result of their participation. That is, it was argued that where, for example, a client participates in an ESA program/service and thus realizes x dollar benefits or dollar savings, it can then leverage these dollars for other uses.

Other examples of the concepts value-added and leverage-gain could be cited. The point being raised here is that the necessary building blocks to maximize the richness of the two concepts are present in the recommended design features.
Also noteworthy, completion of the recommended design features ought to position the ESAs to conveniently establish the dollar benefits and dollar savings, that is, the cost-efficiency of the state's investment in the state network. The necessary steps to document a state's return from its investment in the ESAs are present in the calculations proposed. The importance of being able to substantiate the economic benefits of a state's investment will undoubtedly loom even larger in the future.

THE COMPARATIVE PROFILE

A comparison of the 11 design features used in the five statewide reports is presented in Table 4. It is to be recalled that, as noted earlier, the 11 design features are derived from two sources:

- those that are judged to be minimal expectations of a cost analysis study that purportedly addresses the cost-efficiency of delivering a program/service through an ESA as opposed to some other venue.

- those that are judged to represent optimal ways to present the results of the cost-efficiency study to the policy and research communities at the state and local levels, and to the public.

OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING CURRENT PRACTICES

A number of observations concerning the five statewide studies of ESA programs/ services reviewed in this exercise are offered. These have been organized into two categories: general comments and those relating more directly to the technical features of the reports.

GENERAL COMMENTS

1. The use of cost-analysis studies to support the traditional claim that a statewide network of ESAs provides economic benefits to constituent local school districts and to the state's system of elementary-secondary education is apparently not too common. Our search for examples uncovered a relatively small number of exercises completed in one of the approximately twenty-five states having a statewide or virtually statewide system of ESAs.

2. The interest that exists is of relatively recent origin. The five reports cited, then, should probably be viewed as representing what can be labeled "first generation" exercises. It is also noteworthy that four of the five were sponsored by the ESAs, with three of these actually conducted by the service units. In most cases, the reports do not establish whether or not there was external pressure to engage in the effort. However, the fact that all but one study were sponsored by the service agencies, who, in three of the remaining four, completed the study, suggests that the ESAs were the prime movers behind the studies. Their initiative in this regard thus represents a growing awareness in several of the ESA state communities that there is much to be gained by engaging in an effort of this type. We call upon Levin (1983) for his cognizant reminder that there are multiple reasons why educators need to be concerned about cost studies in education:

   > ...the most superficial answer...is that reference to such analysis is often an important source of persuasion (for more resources)...but the rationale goes beyond such banality...cost effectiveness analysis should be a topic of concern because it can lead to a more efficient use of educational resources...it can reduce the cost of reaching particular objectives, and it can expand what can be accomplished for any particular budget or other resource constraint. (p. 11)

   While Levin's comments were directed at the values of cost-effectiveness studies, we believe they are germane to any form of meaningful cost analysis of the programs/services of an ESA. Moreover, the forces currently impacting state systems of elementary-secondary education will add other rationale for why the first generation efforts undertaken in the five states are commendable and ought to be both strengthened and, further, expanded to other states as well.

3. The language used to label the five state cost-analysis studies frequently proved to be misleading. Some of the studies are labeled one type of cost analysis when on examination they come out as something else, or so it seems, based on what is reported. Levin (1983) argues that four approaches to cost-analysis studies that are in good standing:

   - cost-effectiveness (CE) analysis - the evaluation of alternatives according to both their costs and their effects with regard to producing some outcome or set of outcomes (p. 17).

   - cost-benefit (CB) analysis - evaluation of alternatives according to a comparison of both their costs and benefits when each is measured in monetary terms (p. 21).

   - cost-utility (CU) analysis - the evaluation of alternatives according to a comparison of their costs and the estimated utility or value of their outcomes (p. 26).

   - cost-feasibility (CF) analysis - a method of estimating only the costs of an alternative in order to ascertain whether or not it can be considered (p. 30).

To these four we add cost-efficiency, which is generally viewed to be an attempt to discover whether or not a program/service is being produced for the least cost--in this case whether the program/service can be produced at the least cost by a statewide network of ESAs, or by other service providers, or duplicated by client local school districts.

TECHNICAL FEATURES OF THE FIVE REPORTS

1. The design of statewide cost analysis studies poses several distinct problems not generally addressed in the reports reviewed here. One of these relates to the selection of what programs/services ought to be included. Ordinarily ESAs in a single state provide a set of core programs/services. Individual ESAs in the state, however, typically also engage in a number of additional activities in an effort to be responsive to their clients. It is probably not practical to assume that all of these additional initiatives can be considered for inclusion, and rather, choices need to be made. Presumably, these choices would give an emphasis to all core programs/services offered by all ESAs in the state, including those core activities that are mandated by the state, where applicable, and are clearly related to teaching and learning.

   As argued earlier, the rationale used to select programs/services included in the study should be established. Little rationale or guidance, however, is included in most of the five reports. Failure to do so raises possible concerns about the validity of the report. For example, one might wonder whether or not the ESAs who conducted most of the studies were careful to select those programs/services where the results were likely to be most favorable. Concerns such as this must, and can, be largely preempted.

2. A second issue that must be dealt with in statewide studies is the need to account for regional differences in the computation of (especially) ESA operating costs to deliver a program/service. The use of a uniform statewide dollar value to establish costs, a practice engaged in by several of the studies, ignores variations generally present among ESAs in a state that can affect operating costs (e.g., differences in personnel costs, size of the service region, geographic and population, number of school districts/schools in the service region, taxable valuation of the region where the ESAs have taxing authority). None of the reports provided any information that regional variations were considered.

3. A number of concerns are raised regarding some of the more technical features of a majority of the reports. A majority, for example, failed to include in their studies:

   - Their revenue and expenditure structure. That gap leaves open the question of whether or not any state or federal revenues were used to compute the total ESA operating costs for programs/services, the baseline data source for many subsequent calculations in a cost analysis study.

   - Their total ESA operating costs for each program/service that, for example, is an absolute requirement for any meaningful cost analysis study.

- Although a majority established the direct costs to clients to obtain each program/service, only one (state A) report gave an indication that it considered other costs incurred by clients to obtain an ESA sponsored program/service.

- While a majority of the reports indicated that consideration was given costs to the clients if a program/service was obtained from another provider, only two (states A and B) established that consideration was given to whether or not a program/service was duplicated by the client. This step is also necessary to establish the cost-efficiency of an ESA sponsored activity.

Individually, the failure to address in the reports the major types of concerns cited above raises a serious question concerning the acceptability of the reported results of most of the cost analysis exercises. Collectively, failure to include in the report a consideration of these issues, as was the case in a majority of instances, clearly weakens the validity and reliability of the reported results of the exercises.

4. The inclusion of non-quantifiable benefits in a number of the studies strikes us as a strategy having substantial merit. Most observers would seem to have little difficulty, for example, in accepting the "affordability and access" claim given prominence in one of the reports (state C). Similarly, most would likely accept as having face validity the claim suggested in several of the studies that, absent the ESA, there are no other service providers in a region. In these cases, a constituent local district, particularly the more remote rural or small local systems, might have to do without a program/service critical for a quality program for both the general or special populations of their students. Furthermore, some benefits can be viewed as cost-avoidance where the results of an ESA initiative (and up-front costs) are not realized until after a lengthy period of time. Non-quantifiable claims must of course be labeled as such, a practice followed in most of the reports we reviewed. A quote of Albert Einstein cited in one of the individual ESA-sponsored studies is especially apt here ..."not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts."[7]

5. Various approaches were taken in the two state reports that chose to report the quantifiable results of the cost analysis studies. One report (state A) presents a state aggregate cost-savings amount. Another (state B) provides both a state aggregate figure for each program/service as well as a disaggregated figure for each ESA, and for each program/service offered by the ESA that was included in the cost analysis study.

   As reported earlier, two of the statewide reports gave prominence to aggregate dollar benefits or dollar savings accruing to local districts in the state for each program/service. One of the five disaggregated the data for each ESA for each program/service. We clearly support the latter of these two approaches. Some might hold the view that disaggregating the data by each ESA will lead to unwarranted comparisons among the ESAs in the state network. This is a legitimate concern. However, it would seem that adequate cautions against potential misinterpretations could be expressed in the report (e.g., the special problems of doing statewide studies cited above). Moreover, the establishment of the total operating costs for each program/service by each individual ESA, a design feature suggested earlier, should also help reduce this concern.

Another reason we support the disaggregation of data in the report for each ESA in the state system is that this step facilitates additional disaggregations that will permit the results to be broken down to establish what they mean, for example, for each LEA or for each student enrolled (a practice engaged in by one of the individual ESA studies we reviewed). Doing this can prove to be one of the most persuasive ways to demonstrate the benefits of the ESA to local district officials and staff, and community interests.

MEASURE WHAT WE PRIZE

An old adage, whose origin is uncertain, argues that a public sector organization should measure that which the organization prizes, not just prize that which it can easily measure. In the preceding pages we have attempted to lay out a number of guidelines that are intended to provide those leading educational service agencies with discussion points to consider as they wrestle with the task of measuring that which they prize.

Staying ahead of the curve will most assuredly require demands on the time and energy of the staffs of ESAs. These costs, however, are likely to be more than offset by the resulting benefits. Support for the work of a statewide network of ESAs is in many respects a political decision on how to allocate resources. It seems clear that the information needs of policymakers at the local and state levels will increasingly give weight to economic factors. The efforts of ESAs to document the economic returns of their work will find a receptive audience, and as such, should continue to be given a high priority.

ENDNOTES

1. Illustrative of the language used in statutes creating a statewide network of educational service agencies is that of the legislation creating the regional educational service agencies in West Virginia. The language in the West Virginia Code (Chapter 18, Article 2, Section 26) states: "In order to consolidate and administer more effectively existing educational programs and services so individual districts will have more discretionary moneys for educational improvement and in order to equalize and extend educational opportunities, the state board of education shall establish multicounty regional educational service agencies" (School Laws of West Virginia, 1993 edition, p.19).

2. A retired CPA with extensive experience in a state agency responsible for the administration of programs in a closely related field (human services) was also consulted in the development of the design features of a cost-efficiency study.

3. These four categories of operating costs are ordinarily easily accessible features of most state required budget formats or budget framework under which ESAs conduct their fiscal affairs. The future may witness significant changes in the format of required budget documents as a result of current efforts to perfect money-flow studies. The intent of these efforts is to ensure that resource allocations are aligned with the systemic reform agenda undertaken by a state.

One of the strongest proponents of money-flow studies is the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Center for Workforce Preparation (The Finance Analysis Model, 1995).

4. While valid and reliable data are required in all four categories, the computation of operating costs for personnel is especially critical. Most programs and services of an ESA are labor intensive and personnel costs consequently typically represent the single largest expenditure. As Levin reminds us, a 1 percent error in computing personnel costs can significantly distort the actual costs, whereas a 1 percent error in assigning costs for supplies is not too damaging (p. 72).

5. One of the questions asked of the audience at the conclusion of a paper presentation we made at the 1995 Fall Seminar of the American Association of Educational Service Agencies was for them to provide in writing what they regard to be the major non-quantifiable benefit of the programs and services of their service agency. The themes of the responses were strikingly similar to those cited in the state and individual ESA sponsored reports we reviewed here.

6. Stanley's (1992) dissertation is an excellent study of the costs of collaborative service models when compared to those of an individual school district. Also, two related pieces of note are Galvin's (1995) report on his earlier study in NewYork State of the relationship of local district size and wealth and local district expenditures for programs and services of an educational service agency and Picus and Miller's (1995) report on the measurement of costs in situations where local districts take back programs for seriously disabled students from an educational service agency.

7. The quotation is included in the Pudget Sound ESD (Washington) report (p. 7) that we found to be one of the soundest of the total of 19 we reviewed.

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POSITIONING ESAS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS

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A new century is upon us. Rapid change and increasing complexity permeate our lives and our organizations. Public education and its stakeholders are not exempt from this context of change and complexity. While resources seem to decline, the demands on public education are increasing. Its critics call for greater efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability. Some even call for its demise.

Schools in America are looking for new solutions and partners to meet the demands being placed upon them. A key partner for schools in over 60% of the states are educational service agencies, or ESAs. ESAs are public entities created by statute to provide educational support programs and services to local schools and school districts within a given geographic area. Examples of support programs include professional staff training, curriculum development, financial consultation, personnel services, transportation, food services, custodial and maintenance operations, data processing, testing and assessment, special education, printing, media, purchasing, and other programs traditionally associated with central office administration.

The schools in some states have enjoyed the services of ESAs for forty years or more. As the demands and expectations on public education change, so do the demands on those who serve public schools. These changing demands and intense public scrutiny of our system of education have prompted educational service agencies to reassess their purpose, their services, their future, and their relationship with one another. In 1993 ESA leaders began to ask whether they could envision a national system of educational service agencies with the possibility of nationwide impact through greater collaboration and joint planning.

This paper explores the resulting initiatives and summarizes the last two planning efforts of ESAs who are members of the American Association of Educational Service Agencies, AAESA.

AAESA: THE ORGANIZATION AND ITS HISTORY

The majority of ESAs in America are members of the American Association of Educational Service Agencies, AAESA. Now serving over 400 members, AAESA developed from an initial organization formed in 1978 to serve approximately 40 ESAs. AAESA is a professional association which serves as the national voice for service agencies and provides its members with professional development, legislative advocacy, research and publications, membership networks and contacts, and technical assistance in developing programs and services. The organization is governed by nine executive council members elected for three year terms by their

peers in three geographic regions of the country. AAESA employs an executive director who maintains operations of the organization out of the national office located in Arlington, Virginia, which also houses the American Association of School Administrators (AASA).

Of the various events and services offered by AAESA for its members, the most prominent is the fall/winter national conference hosted typically the first week in December. The executive council members take major responsibility for organizing and hosting this event.

OUR COLLECTIVE VISION: ENGAGING THE MEMBERS, ST. PETERSBURG BEACH, FLORIDA 1993

It was during preparation for the 1993 national conference held at St. Petersburg Beach, Florida that council members began to discuss the possibility of bringing members together to develop a collective vision of what they might become as a national system of ESAs. It was decided to host such a session as a pre-conference event on the day ahead of the scheduled conference.

Organizers of this pre-conference session issued special invitations to ESA staff and administrators who possessed expertise in one of six areas: special education, staff development, legislation/lobbying, management/leadership, technology, and curriculum/instruction. Additional conference attendees were invited to attend if they were present.

Conference hosts selected a private firm to facilitate the pre-conference session. The McNellis Company used a company developed "compression planning" process to guide the participants through the session. Part of this process included the development of "overall project purpose" and "purpose of session" statements:

Overall Project Purpose:	To energize and mobilize ESAs nationwide.
Purposes of Session:	1) To develop 3 or 4 key elements of our vision for the future. 2) To develop 3 or 4 key actions to drive our vision.

The morning session was organized to elicit "four to five cutting edge ideas which can impact the national system of ESAs" from teams organized in the six expert areas above. The afternoon session asked participants in teams to develop "key elements of our vision" and "key action ideas."

THE RESULTS

Through brainstorming responses to several questions tailored to each group, participants produced several ideas that were supported by everyone in each of the six expert areas. Their conclusions are summarized below:

Special Education

Participants in the special education expert group advocated for the elimination of the current dual educational system by creating a full continuum of educational services that treat all children and youth equitably. In support of this position the group called for adequate preparation for all school personnel to be able to serve all children and youth, sufficient funds with adequate flexibility, and a proactive staff role in bringing about such a system. In addition the group called for greater community collaboration to build full continuums of service which support and enhance development and learning.

Staff Development

Those in the staff development group called for a national staff development action plan suggesting that special assistance be directed toward those ESAs focused on school improvement and organizational development activities. They additionally suggested that the collective talent of ESAs nationwide be tapped to promote multi-media delivery systems and programs for staff development and, further, that new alliances be formed with private and public sector partners to strengthen the number and quality of services offered.

Curriculum/Instruction

Experts in this group advocated for ESAs to become leaders of change and to develop visionary market driven service centers which deliver or facilitate local district planning, contemporary leadership/management training, study group opportunities, organizational change assistance, enhanced communication options, new technology applications, integrated curriculum models/training, tech-prep support, and the development of learning organizations and communities.

Management/Leadership

Participants in this team realized that the all ESAs might increase their impact through the synergy which could result if ESAs saw themselves as and acted like a national system of ESAs. They suggested that such a system should become a key voice for the needs of children to be a national priority. Additionally the group saw ESAs nationally and locally as key catalysts for increased collaboration and partnering on behalf of learners. Also asserted was a belief that leaders of tomorrow need to be increasingly results oriented and fully utilize and integrate the emerging "information superhighway."

Media/Technology

The growing popularity of site-based management presents new opportunities for ESAs to provide assistance and resources to their constituents concluded this group. They encouraged development and use of a national digital information network to provide information, training, and services. It was suggested that the increased use of such technologies could help assure equity of access for learners as it becomes easier to match tools to the unique learning needs of students.

Legislation/Lobbying

Legislative experts called for both immediate and longer term action. They asserted that an immediate need exists for a fact sheet and video which could be used in lobbying and informing national and state policy makers about ESAs. Additionally, they called for the development of language which could be inserted by policy makers in legislation making ESAs eligible for participation in various programs. Longer term suggestions included increasing contact and strengthening personal relationships with policy makers and promoting ESAs as key agents to facilitate increased interagency collaboration.

Building on the work of the morning session expert groups, the afternoon groups focused on "key vision elements" and "key actions." Time constraints did not allow total group consensus on vision and actions, but each of six small groups reached consensus on 3-5 recommendations for each of the two categories. The collective recommendations from the participants are summarized below:

Key Elements Of An ESA Vision For The Future

As participants looked to the future of ESAs, they envisioned ESAs across the United States as:

- Carrying out most of the local school district central office support functions more cost effectively; i.e., transportation, telecommunications, facility maintenance, insurance, etc.
- Becoming more market driven and entrepreneurial.
- Being a nationally recognized network for service delivery.
- Being centers for communication/data networks (digital).
- Providing the ultimate in flexibility, timely response, and personal service.
- "Walking the talk," or operating the ESA in the same ways that are advocated by the ESA to the local district.
- Providing educators with continuous training to meet their professional development needs.
- Assisting legislators in appreciating the value of ESAs.
- Providing leadership, training, and cutting edge information to schools which enable them to be dynamic learning communities.
- Facilitating collaboration and building coalitions to share information, resources, and learning among a variety of public and private entities.

- Assuring equity of access for all learners to programs, services, and information.
- Playing a broker role in bringing the educational system together.
- Modeling effective change and developing a synergistic service system.
- Demonstrating superior accountability in the delivery of customer driven, results oriented services.
- Defining societal issues affecting public education and then leading in the goal/ action planning to assist education locally and nationally.
- Assisting schools with integration of new technologies.
- Serving as a catalyst for change to save public education.
- Reinforcing the perception by school districts that ESAs are the first and only place to go for support, ideas, and assistance.
- Providing technical assistance for school improvement (O.B.E., school transformation, etc.)

Key Actions To Drive Our Vision

Participants decided that achievement of the ESA vision would require some specific actions to close the gap from "what is" to "what is desired." Those actions were identified as follows:

- Develop a national mission statement which identifies who we are, what we do (roles/functions), and why we exist.
- Communicate the above directly to our local constituency and encourage that constituency to support ESA services when speaking to state policy makers. AAESA should communicate the same to national policy makers.
- Hire a lobbyist to assure inclusion of ESAs as service providers within federal legislation.
- Use existing and new technologies to inform population on advantages of service agencies.
- Show how ESAs can deliver services more efficiently and economically to local school districts and other entities and demonstrate this fiscal efficiency and effectiveness to legislators.
- Initiate dialogue with other government and non-profit agencies and take leadership in bringing them together for collaborative work and influence.
- Market and publicize our work in a more creative and effective manner.

- Construct a framework for a "pro-active" public relations plan regarding the role of ESAs in public education.

- Acquaint local boards with ESA services.

- Develop and support common goals for AAESA to strengthen the organization.

- Encourage each ESA to become a "live" Internet site that connects schools.

- Bring research and effective practice together for the field.

- Create inter-connectiveness of all ESAs and other appropriate agencies on topics of common concern.

- Analyze and interpret social data, develop action plans/goals for schools of the next century, and disseminate ideas to various publics.

- Develop, adopt, and apply TQM philosophy.

While most participants expressed satisfaction with both the process and the outcomes of the day, conference planners were left with reams of data and responses from the event yet with limited consensus because of time constraints. In addition, because this was a first time event, there was no clear process for this type of information to be summarized and integrated into a national priority agenda. Eventually the results, in summary form, were shared as critical background data with AAESA Executive Council members at their last major planning event held on April 22, 1995 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. They blended the St. Petersburg Beach results with current contextual factors as they developed content for a strategic plan.

AAESA STRATEGIC PLANNING 1995

In preparation for his term as president of AAESA, Glen Shaw from Minnesota, called a strategic planning meeting for members of the Executive Council and staff on April 22, 1995 in Minneapolis. He asked out-going council member Ron Fielder of Iowa and current member Joe Lagana of Pennsylvania to facilitate the planning session using the McNellis "compression planning" techniques. Throughout the day various questions were used to help participants arrive at a set of strategic priorities for AAESA. Information from the St. Petersburg Beach pre-conference session was used as a foundation for this work.

At the conclusion of the event, five strategic priorities emerged. The five categories legislation, (3) new products and services, (4) leadership, and (5) finances. Each of the five priorities are listed by goal statement below with accompanying recommendations.

1. Communication

AAESA will improve and expand communications from Washington, D. C. to membership through newsletter articles on successful programs and practices and among and between members through providing Internet linkages and necessary awareness and training activities. The association will commission a journal that will focus on ESAs and give examples of successful programs provided by member agencies. Additional recommendations included keeping membership informed on a timely basis, expanding the number of publications, sponsoring live or virtual conversations on specific topics, and becoming a clearinghouse for information.

2. Legislation

The organization will establish a legislative network for AAESA which will meet the following specifications:

- Will have the ability to identify key issues with corresponding initiatives driven by specific recommendations.

- Will provide a vehicle for information exchange between the national office of AAESA and states with a rapid alert component. Included in this bilateral system will be data regarding state legislation activities, the sharing of promising initiatives, and quick response feedback for damage control.

Additional recommendations included initiating legislation, considering a legislative exchange meeting, obtaining incentive funding for technology, and planning to work on state level legislation.

3. New Products and Services

AAESA will develop a process to determine needs of member districts relative to new products and services by bringing together on a regional basis representatives of as many states as possible and by surveying member districts. Additional recommendations included marketing topical conferences, developing a think tank and a "roll-out" process for critical issues, developing entrepreneurial technical assistance services, and building the image for ESAs nationally and on a state basis.

4. Leadership

AAESA's primary mission is to help agency leaders develop leadership skills for the 21st Century. Suggested strategies included the following programs:

- Fall seminar to contain a leadership development strand.

- Pre-Conference to focus on necessary leadership skills for the 21st Century.

- Ad-hoc committees established to: 1) analyze relevant research; 2) develop leadership profile; 3) recommend to the AAESA Council a plan for leadership skill building activities; 4) recommend to the AAESA council a plan to link leadership skill development with AASA programs and services to meet the needs of all school leaders.

5. Finances

   AAESA will expand our revenue base to enhance our long term financial stability so that we can expand membership service.

At the conclusion of the day, council members were appointed to small committees to oversee action in each of the strategic priority areas. The group further agreed to capture and communicate to membership results of the day's efforts and to proceed with plan implementation.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THESE PLANNING EVENTS

Now that we are more than one year beyond these planning events, perhaps some observations are in order. The most significant aspect of these events is that they happened. They were landmark events in the life of AAESA and its member ESAs. They marked the first attempt at broad based member involvement in designing the future for ESAs and providing direction to AAESA leadership. The essence of the story is that ESAs have begun to act as a "national system of ESAs."

As one examines the results of the two planning sessions, some key common themes emerge. They include: (1) the need for higher skill levels in demonstrating effectiveness and efficiency, (2) increased national visibility and leadership regarding advocacy for children and education issues, (3) a focus on technology acquisition and application, (4) a changing face and role for special education, (5) positioning ESAs positively with state and national policy makers, (6) increased collaboration and coalition building on local, state, and national levels, (7) school improvement as a primary function, and (8) equity of access for both adult and pre-adult learners.

While it might be a difficult to prove that these events in fact brought about specific developments, it can be demonstrated that during and since these two activities numerous steps have been or are in the process of being implemented on behalf of the nation's ESAs.

AAESA as an organization has been in a rapid growth mode during this time. A number of new members have joined; the majority of those became members through the full state membership option. Additionally, attendance at the December national conference has grown well over two hundred percent. This activity is occurring at the same time that policy makers in some states are scrutinizing ESAs rather closely. By law changes are now being proposed which will allow for more equitable participation for states in the AAESA leadership selection process.

Through a partnership with a member ESA, AAESA has, in a very short period of time, regained its fiscal health through better fiscal management. In addition, Internet

access and connectivity to ESA/AAESA information and links have been established. A more frequent and expanded AAESA newsletter has been visible for several months now. The national conference and AASA pre-conference sessions have begun to focus time on ESA strategic priority areas. This journal has become a means of discussing ESAs in greater depth than was heretofore possible.

Since the employment of Bruce Hunter as executive director and lobbyist AAESA has accomplished its initial goals of increasing federal lobbying efforts and drafting language defining ESAs for insertion in legislation whenever appropriate. Additionally, ESA representatives are invited to a yearly planning session held to draft legislative positions for the upcoming congressional session. More frequent and comprehensive updates on federal policy making activity are provided to members.

Also obvious is a recent increase in the development of collaborative relationships among ESAs and between ESAs and national organizations. Public-private partnerships are also being negotiated currently between ESAs or AAESA and private vendors. It seems that ESAs are coming to the realization that partnerships can compound our strengths on behalf of our clients.

CONCLUSION

It appears that ESAs across America are realizing that working, learning, and planning together can add significantly to the viability of the agencies themselves as well to as the quality of service provided to their clients. At the very least the two planning events described in this paper offered an opportunity to learn from efforts to improve collaborative planning. At most they provided an immediate agenda for action to improve the nation's ESAs as well as a foundation upon which to build future collaborative planning efforts.

Of critical importance, however, is the need to develop a structure and process not only to plan, but to successfully implement strategic priorities across the emerging "national system" of ESAs. Additionally, if indeed we value the "national system" notion, then perhaps its time to examine the possibility of developing a set of national standards for ESAs against which individual agencies can benchmark and improve themselves. AAESA is best positioned for this effort because of its recent rapid development and its ability to bring the necessary key players together.

While at times it appears to have been difficult to implement all of the recommendations from the two described planning events in the ways suggested, it seems that the events may have been key catalysts in the development of ESAs and the recognition that major benefits can result from increased national unity and collaboration. Results from these events need to be measured as soon as possible, and at the same time plans should be well underway to initiate the next major planning/ visioning activity to successfully position ESAs for success in a new century.

ESAS AND CHARTER SCHOOLS: DEFINING THE ROLE

By
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Charter school advocates call their initiatives a "movement" and given the fact that 26 states have enabling legislation and 12 more are considering it, they may be right. If educational service agencies (ESAs) haven't dealt with a charter school yet, they should get prepared.....one may be coming soon.

Since the first charter school in Minnesota was started in 1991, California and Michigan have joined Minnesota as leaders in the charter school movement. In Michigan, 43 public school academies are presently operational serving over 5000 students. Another 40 to 50 charters are expected to open in the fall of 1996, a significant number considering the legislation creating them was passed in 1994.

Educational Service Agencies should not be unprepared (as many in Michigan were) for the arrival of charter schools. Although legislation that creates them varies from state to state, it seems there are some common dilemmas and concerns regardless of the details of the law.

Kent Intermediate School District in Grand Rapids, Michigan currently has six charter schools operating within its service area comprised of 20 K-12 districts and approximately 100,000 students.. All except one are chartered by state universities. (They may also be chartered by K-12s and ESAs). It seems that everyone in the community has strong feelings pro and con about charter schools. For the most part, traditional ESA customers--K-12 districts (board members, administrators, teachers)--are opposed to charter schools, while the political structure along with the local media are for them. With the advent of charters and their unique status often independent from traditional districts, ESAs are faced with legal, political, and educational issues which should cause an examination of their approaches to service and leadership toward these new entities. Therefore, it was important for Kent ESA to clarify its leadership and service role relative to charters.

What follows is an attempt to examine the new phenomenon of charter schools and their relationship to educational service agencies. Hopefully, the Kent ISD experience will help other service agencies examine their role in dealing with charter schools.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

In Michigan public school academies (charter schools) were created by Public Act 416 of 1994. After a shaky start with a court challenge which left them unfunded and a legislative "fix," which again funded them, charter schools are now operating and growing with full legislative authority and promotion from the Governor's office and other political and community groups. Charter schools were given most of the rights and responsibilities of established school districts with some notable exceptions. A major exception is that they have no election authority. They have no authority to hold bond or enhancement millage elections or even publicly elect their Board of Education members. This is significant because, pending legal action or clarification, these differences allow them to be viewed as buildings not as school districts. For ESAs the building/district distinction can legitimately help define some relationships which will require slightly different ESA roles toward charter schools than toward local districts.

There are many perceptions about charter school requirements. Most believe that they do not have the same obligations under the law as public school districts. For the most part that is not true. Charter schools under the original pieces of legislation had virtually the same requirements as local districts. The fact that they were able to use student assessment tests other than the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) was one of the few exceptions. Under the revised School Code of 1996, however, the legislature has imposed additional requirements for charter schools. For example, along with now mandating the MEAP for all students, the state also required the Michigan Department of Education to evaluate charter schools and report to the legislature on such an evaluation.

For ESAs in Michigan, the legal aspects of charter schools have a rather simple and clear message; i.e., for all intents and purposes, they are entitled to the same services, cooperative programming and monitoring as are buildings within K-12 school districts.

POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

If an ESA is closely attuned to its customers (primarily local districts in Michigan), then its non-mandated policies and operating procedures reflect that customer input. In addition, the leadership positions taken by the ESAs are based on perceptions that there is a correct path that constituent districts need to take and that it is an important role to lead them in that direction. Real or implied, the power is with the locals. Now there may be a new player, and that new player is not always going to be a welcome member of the team especially by some local districts. These districts have many concerns--some based on fact, others not. There is a financial concern that given a finite pot of state money: the more students going to charter schools, the fewer dollars available for school districts. In addition, higher education chartering offices are skimming off that pot as well. In the not-a-level-playing-field concern, it is thought that charter schools have advantages that local districts don't--smaller class size, lower overhead, ability to select their students, etc. Local districts complain that they can't compete when charter schools take their good students--who are easier to teach and therefore have higher test scores. This leads to charter schools being able to

attract even more students. There is also a perception in Michigan that state created charters are just one step towards student vouchers which would include private and religious schools. Given these and other concerns, ESAs must be sensitive as to how their traditional customers are viewing charter schools.

On the other hand, charter schools are the darlings of the current political power structure in many states. (Polls indicate that about half of Michigan citizens are supportive of charters.) So there is a notion, at least among politicians, that ESAs are expected to provide full services to charter schools and that they will be judged accordingly in the political arena. This is a notion also held by many in ESA leadership positions.

Therefore without careful strategies, ESAs could easily find themselves caught between some negative attitudes toward charter schools on the part of their constituent districts and their obligation as a creation of the state to provide necessary leadership and services to all buildings within its service area. Firm leadership, planning and communication between and among all parties is the key to avoiding a situation where an ESA loses its customer support or state political support, or both.

EDUCATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Education for students should be the real key to defining the relationship between ESAs and charter schools. The focus must be on the students. Probably 99.9% of the students now (or soon to be) in charter schools were in the same ESA service area when they were in their local school. If ESA services truly have the students as the bottom line--that shouldn't change just because they are in a different building. Therefore, leadership and services to students either direct or indirect should be as consistent as possible between charter schools and local district buildings. If improving education is a primary mission of ESAs, that mission has students as its focal point. This means all students, regardless of their location inside the service area.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is probable that once a charter school is operating, the ESA will begin to get questions from staff and parents about the kind and frequency of ESA services available to it. It is also probable that the charter school will have little knowledge about the role and function of an ESA. ESAs should look upon this search for information as an opportunity. Therefore, it is essential that ESA leadership establish contact with a developing charter as soon as possible. Care must be taken, however, to communicate information about these contacts to local district superintendents to avoid the perception of giving secret support to an entity that some locals may be against.

It is advisable to have an early meeting with the charter school leadership which may include representatives of the chartering agency (i.e., universities). Key ESA staff should also attend and the overall mission and function of the ESA should be explained. However, the key to understanding the relationship may be five basic

operating premises which, if implemented, could make that relationship a smooth one.

1. **Charter schools will be treated as buildings rather than districts for purposes of ESA services.**

   Perhaps this point can best be made by using the following scenario: If a charter school was viewed as a school district rather than a school building, then it is conceivable that the charter school director would then sit on the local district superintendents council with equal status and full voting privilege. Given the goals of the charter movement, it is conceivable that in the not too distant future, there would be more charter school directors in the meeting than superintendents. Yet they would represent only a small percentage of the students.

2. **Charter schools will be provided the same ESA services as are provided to other public schools.**

   Services provided to local district buildings and staff such as school improvement, technical assistance, health and drug awareness training, media services, etc., should be made available on the same basis to charter schools. Charter school directors and staff should be encouraged to participate in events and workshops the same as district principals and staff. They should also serve on ESA advisory committees where principals and teachers normally serve. A good rule of thumb for such participation by the way may be as follows: If the advisory committee is ESA sponsored and normally chaired by ESA staff, e.g., a technology advisory committee, skill committees for vocational education, etc., then the charter should be invited to participate. If the group is more than just advisory and has its own purpose and defined leadership; e.g. superintendents' association, county curriculum council, etc., then the group itself should decide whether or not to include charter school members.

3. **Fees for ESA services are the same for charters as are charged local districts.**

   It is important not to discriminate in any way. ESAs, however, should be aware of students who are attending charter schools in one ESA service area and living in another. Can that student attend an area vocational center or receive special education services even though taxes on the student's residence may go to another ESA? Policies and procedures for dealing with these issues should be in place before the situation arises.

4. **ESA funds are paid directly to the charters just as they would be paid to local districts.**

   In Michigan the basic state aid foundation grant is paid by the State to the chartering agency. However, other monies go directly to the charter from the ESA just as if the charter school is a local district. Distribution of ESA wide special education millage can be especially difficult, particularly if there are local rules governing such distribution. Local districts in Kent ISD, for example, have

agreed not to be reimbursed for contracted special education services. That rule would cause charters to have to hire their own speech therapists in order to receive reimbursement, instead of simply contracting for those services with their local school district. Federal special education funds also may be a problem if there are local rules for distribution. In order to have positive relationships with both the charters and local districts, these kinds of things have to be anticipated, discussed, and explained or changed.

5. **The ESA has a responsibility to inservice charters on all operating procedures, rules and regulations.**

   ESA compliance rules apply to charter schools exactly as they do to locals; therefore, taking extra time initially to make charter leaders understand procedures could save grief in the future. Without a full understanding of special education procedures such as an ESA's mediation function, costly hearings could result where all districts would be financial losers. Child accounting rules are complex, but communicating with charters and helping them to "count kids" could save hours of paperwork and hassles later. The ESA should resist the temptation, however, to watch the every move of the charter officials in hopes of catching them making a mistake. That attitude will not serve anyone well, especially the students.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that some basic considerations have been presented that will allow ESAs who have not yet been required to deal with the new phenomena of charter schools to determine the role they will take in establishing routine relationships with their charter schools.

Charter schools will be with us a long time. Most will do a good job for students and parents. Some will operate poorly and be a real drain on taxpayers. (There have already been examples of "profit taking" in Michigan.) All will use scarce state financial resources, but the goal for an ESA is to work with them, not because ESAs are committed to making sure they are successful, but because there are students there.

COMPUTER SERVICES FOR THE NEXT CENTURY

by
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LEADING WITH TECHNOLOGY

The Computer Services Department at Region 10 Education Service Center is keeping up with technology to provide better service to its member school districts. Computer technology is evolving at an ever increasing pace that requires consistent effort to remain at the forefront and maintain that position. Region 10 Computer Services is meeting the challenge by continuing research of what is available in the marketplace, providing its employees and customers with leading edge technology.

The mainframe computer is the heart and soul of Region 10 Education Service Center Computer Services. Mainframe technology provides a stable base for the districts' student and business data. Computer Services recently installed a new IBM mainframe, a 9672 R31 Enterprise Server, to speed up operations and stay current with technology. This new mainframe allows access for multiple operating systems. It takes up 50 square feet, 600 square feet less than the older machine, and uses less power producing about 1/3 faster processing speeds. DB2 serves as the core database for applications giving a firm foundation to districts' data needs.

A Novell network is provided to connect all employees through e-mail and allows a central storage area for information. At this time, all employees have a PC on their desk running either Windows 3.1 or Windows 95 and access the mainframe through a third party software package. PCs allow the employees to use popular word processing and spreadsheet packages to augment their ability to support districts.

The Internet is a very hot topic these days with businesses and educators rushing to create homepages and access the world-wide web. Computer Services is exploring the possibility of installing an Internet server to become part of the Internet. This server would store information for districts to browse and download data using Internet browsing software or using the Texas Education Network (TENET). Region 10 is currently designing a homepage that gives more information about the center and has links to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and other educational homepages.

WORKING FOR THE DISTRICTS

Providing service for member districts is the primary concern for Region 10 Education Service Center Computer Services. By learning about new technology and products, Computer Services is able to provide this information to its districts.

Computer Services and its member districts operate a Cooperative, the North Texas Multi-Regional Processing Center (NTMRPC), to pull together resources for decisions regarding the following items:

- hardware
- software
- service and support
- pricing

The districts have all voting rights and make all decisions. Department staff only offer advice. The common goal of this Cooperative is to provide the best service at the lowest price. The NTMRPC selects members to meet regularly to discuss and plan for Cooperative growth. This group is the Operations Advisory Committee (OAC). Computer Services is completely driven by the NTMRPC and its committees.

In the fall of 1994, Computer Services began receiving feedback from its member districts that they wanted new business and student services applications. The OAC met to review the options and make a decision. The OAC then created the student and business software subcommittees, made up of current software users from the districts, to contact third party vendors for demonstrations.

The Cooperative is presently pioneering a new concept of service and support for its districts, called a Shared Distribution Personnel Unit, to create a direct link between Computer Services and the districts. The Shared Distribution Personnel Unit concept basically means a district houses a Computer Services consultant on site, as opposed to Computer Services sending a consultant out to provide support. This is very useful because Computer Services trains the consultant and provides continuing education so the consultant can be better prepared to meet the needs of the districts. At this time there are several employees providing network and software support out in districts. Two of these districts are currently sharing an employee because they do not need a full-time employee committed to maintaining their networks. This cooperation between Computer Services and the districts helps to strengthen the Cooperative and provide positive results.

The OAC Pricing Committee meets regularly to determine pricing for services. Each district pays a share based on its overall size and actual use of the software and services. This provides a level playing field for all districts, regardless of income.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The mainframe computer is enjoying a resurgence in today's technologically advanced world. With advances in its capabilities, it will continue to play a role in the computer industry by interacting with other operating systems. This is combining the best of both worlds, the speed, power, and reliability of mainframe technology with personal computers. This interaction is allowing mainframes to serve a larger role in Wide Area Networks (WANS) and Local Area Networks

(LANS). These changes in technology ensure that the mainframe will continue to be a solid foundation for educational data processing.

Region 10 Education Service Center Computer Services is positioning itself to assume a leadership role in technology as its districts move into the next century. With a dedicated staff and continued success with the Cooperative, Region 10 Education Service Center Computer Services plans to be the model for educational data processing.

THE FIVE "C"S OF AN ESD

By
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A dilemma consistently faced by ESD administrators was brought home to me at a recent board meeting. Our constituent school district superintendents have been lobbying for the ESD to provide additional assistance in the area of technology implementation and training. They want the ESD to provide someone who can not only design networks and provide assistance with planning for the future of technology in their districts but who can also troubleshoot and provide hands-on service in installing and maintaining the hardware involved.

The demand for technical assistance in the area of technology has grown dramatically in the last three years. The addition of this position or the provision of equal services through contracting would not come inexpensively. The issue for an ESD of our size, servicing seven school districts with a population of 14,500 students, becomes one of deciding which other programs have to undergo sacrifices to accommodate this additional assistance in the area of technology.

After listening to the desires of the district superintendents at several meetings, we had looked at next year's proposed budget and prepared a proposal that included funding for the technology position. This well intended proposal had negative consequences. When the technology position issue came up at the board meeting, board members felt that they had not been apprised of the situation soon enough and that a decision to reallocate resources to technology needed more Board input. While it had never been the intent of administration to change the focus of ESD programs or by-pass the Board, the issue did teach us an important lesson. Even though we had assumed the Board would approve or disapprove the reallocation of resources through the process of approving the budget, we had not done enough preparation up front with board members to bring the situation to their attention. We had been so intent on trying to meet the needs of the districts that we had not done our homework with our Board.

Who was right? Our Board was. No matter how needy constituent districts may be and how much they want an ESD to provide certain programs, it is the ESD Board that sets the direction and approves what programs are offered. The constituent districts, while sincere in their needs, are basically looking for a way to have their needs met at no or low costs to themselves. It is up to the ESD Board to weigh whether the need is appropriately met by the ESD and to determine where the priorities of the administration should be. So how does an administration respond and maintain the appropriate balance between fulfilling the wishes of local superintendents and meeting the expectations of the Board? First, it is necessary to face the fact that a service agency won't always be able to respond to every request from local districts. Just as happened in this instance, the agency may err even though

its intentions are "pure". To keep his or her conscience clear, the best an ESD administrator can do is heed the five "C"s of an ESD.

COMMITMENT: Most service agency leaders sought this position because they were committed to the idea of providing services to students and educators that they could not receive elsewhere. Achieving success in pursuit of this goal requires that they be constantly aware of district needs, familiar with current research and trends in "best practice," and apprised of current developments in responding to education needs in the state.

Often an education service agency is the major line of communication between the state department of education and the local districts. As state education agencies have been downsized due to budget cuts, the role of the ESD has become one of liaison and interpreter of the state dictates and requirements. This often means that the service agency can be the bearer of either good or bad news. No matter how difficult the task, the ESD must remain committed to keeping districts informed and be willing to facilitate meetings and activities that assist districts in meeting local, state and federal requirements.

COOPERATION: The importance of cooperation is exemplified by the fact that many of the education service agencies in our nation are called cooperatives. Being cooperative means that the needs of the group will take precedence over the needs of the individual districts. It is often the role of the ESD administrator to finesse this "cooperation" between constituent districts. In our county it took two years of meetings at the ESD between high school principals and superintendents before agreement could be reach on an open enrollment policy for high school students. It would not have happened without ESD administrators consistently pointing out how the advantages could outweigh the disadvantages and that "turf" issues could be overcome by maintaining open lines of communication.

COLLABORATION: Collaboration takes the ESD a step beyond cooperation. Collaboration requires that the agency back up its words with deeds, especially by putting necessary resources behind jointly determined projects. It also means that the agency must be open to partnering with other entities, some quite new to the education scene, in providing services to constituent districts and students. These may include private business in school-to-work partnerships, social service agencies, and state and local agencies. In working with others the focus needs to stay on how the needed service can best be provided and if collaborating with an outside entity can provide a service or product as well and more cost effectively. The ESD administrator owes it to the persons served to explore the relationship.

CONSERVATION: The ESD administrator needs to conserve in two ways. The first is the most obvious. By their very nature, ESDs are expected to provide services that are cost effective. That is why they provide them rather than individual districts providing them for themselves. The cost of many services we provide would be prohibitive to the small districts we serve. Therefore, the ESD administrator has to keep cost at the forefront as new ways of delivery are explored.

The other act of conservation demanded of the ESD administrator is less obvious, but no less important. Every education service agency has a history of programs it provides. These differ from county to county and from state to state. Frequently, as the years go on, new ways of delivering service and priorities of constituent districts can change. It is often left to the ESD administrator and ultimately the ESD Board to evaluate whether a new program should be implemented. One factor that needs to be considered is how implementing a new program will affect what is presently offered. In the thrill and excitement of starting fresh ventures, the value of "old" programs is sometimes diminished. Care needs to be taken to conserve what is good and what works. A program or service that may have been around for awhile may still be having a positive impact on the lives of students and the community.

CARING: ESDs are often the "Statues of Liberty" of educational districts. School districts send us the students that are often too high need for them to serve on their own cost effectively. My own agency serves multiply handicapped, seriously emotionally disturbed, at-risk, adjudicated and migrant students. It also provides curriculum improvement, home school registration, a media library, technology services and electronic repair, a print shop, cooperative purchasing and fiscal services to our districts. One superintendent and five administrators facilitate ESD operations with one hundred fifteen staff members.

As administrators, it is expected that we will care about our students and staff. Because of the population of students an ESD helps educate and the constant need to balance constituent district needs with board priorities, an ESD administrator needs to adopt an attitude and aptitude for service that goes beyond simple caring to that of having a "servant's heart." This means that whether our mission is realized is defined by the results of our work, not by whether we get the credit for doing it or how difficult it was to put a program in place.

If we keep the five "C"s in mind, our task should be much more clear and we will be able to communicate more effectively with both local districts and our Board.

THE NORTHWEST IOWA AEA COOPERATIVE: A MODEL OF COOPERATION

by
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Four of Iowa's Area Education Agencies (AEAs) developed a cooperative agreement approximately ten years ago to establish a framework for working together. The Northwest Iowa AEA Cooperative focuses on activities better accomplished by a group of AEAs rather than an individual AEA. The Cooperative is dedicated to providing educators in northwest Iowa specific programs and services that might not otherwise be possible if each AEA only worked individually.

The four AEAs that are part of the Cooperative include Lakeland AEA 3 located in Cylinder, AEA 4 located in Sioux Center, Arrowhead AEA 5 located in Fort Dodge, and Western Hills AEA 12 located in Sioux City. These AEAs are 4 of the 15 which cover Iowa. The four AEAs that are members of the cooperative cover the northwest quarter of Iowa.

This Cooperative was formed when the Chief Administrators of the four AEAs determined that there were activities which were better and more efficiently implemented when they involved more than a single AEA. These activities are ones which are beyond the basic services provided by each AEA. Each cooperative activity is one where it is more appropriate and cost effective to work together.

Each AEA has its basic core of services which are provided to its customers, the local school districts and in some cases the parents and students. Examples of the basic core of services include the special education support services to local schools through the Special Education Division; the staff development and curricular consultation provided through the Educational Services Division; and printing, videos, films, and other technology services provided through the Media Division.

PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES

As the Cooperative has developed, a number of philosophical principles for the Northwest Iowa AEA Cooperative have been written. These principles form a framework for the development of the cooperative activities. These philosophical principles are:

1. The Northwest Iowa AEA Cooperative is a very viable model of operation. It is a model that can be replicated throughout the state of Iowa and in other states.
2. The vision of the Cooperative is to assist local schools in their job of better educating their students.
3. The Cooperative is a system that is part of the statewide AEA Strategic Planning activities that promote external cooperation among AEAs.

4. Cooperation is a superior style of operation compared to competition.
5. Our Cooperative needs to continually consider other cooperative endeavors among our four AEAs which meet identified needs.
6. The Cooperative needs a specific budget from which to operate as the financial needs of the Cooperative requires a specific commitment from each participating AEA.
7. The members of the Cooperative need to continually consider ways to strengthen it and make it more effective.

Over the years, the number of cooperative activities has expanded greatly. Initially the member agencies offered few services together, but programs increased as the four AEAs grew more comfortable working together and new areas of cooperation were identified. This expansion of services exemplifies the importance of starting small and then growing based on identified needs. This growth pattern seems typical of organizations and cooperative efforts.

THE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

One of the first major cooperative ventures was The Leadership Academy, which focuses on developing an awareness of major educational leadership issues. Its mission is to generate, facilitate and support leadership growth opportunities for all educators in the area. The Leadership Academy sponsors four or five inservice programs each year. Each program focuses on some area of educational leadership. The focus is at the awareness level. It is expected that those interested in the topic will build on the knowledge received at the Academy.

Some of the topics covered in Leadership Academy programs include authentic assessment, new learning theories, the educational leadership journey, technology, mastery teaching and community partnerships. Each of the topics is presented in a one-day conference.

DIVISION ACTIVITIES

The Directors of the different AEA Divisions meet on a periodic basis. Though there are many purposes for the meetings, much time is spent on sharing ideas about topics of mutual interest and in discussing and planning potential cooperative activities which could be operated through the Cooperative.

The Media Division Directors implemented a cooperative van route. This allows the four AEAs to share low use/high cost materials. There is a single drop location where a van from each AEA will go to weekly to pick up items from other AEAs and leave items headed to the other AEAs. The print shops in the different AEAs specialize in some areas of production. The other three AEAs will use that AEA for the specialized production thereby expanding services at a reduced cost.

Examples of cooperative activities in media services include: (1) cooperative purchasing, (2) poster printing, (3) video production, (4) large formal lamination, (5)

microform copying, (6) video cassettes loans, (7) bulletin board letters and figures, (8) video duplication, and (9) inservices.

The Educational Services Divisions of each AEA focus on such activities as staff development, curriculum development, computer usage and other similar activities. Through the AEA Cooperative, the Educational Services activities have been numerous. Examples of these activities include (1) a Northwest Iowa Legislative meeting during the state legislative session, (2) special subject area meetings such as art and guidance, and (3) specialized seminars in such areas as Section 504, tech prep, reading recovery, and industrial arts. In addition, special programs have included an Early Childhood Specialist serving the four AEAs, and a Grant Writer also serving the entire area. At times, the four AEAs have shared consultants.

The Special Education Divisions of the four AEAs do a lot of informal networking and sharing of ideas. A number of inservice programs have also been conducted, including: (1) training assistive technology teams, (2) special inservice for speech and language staffs, (3) cooperatively purchasing expensive equipment for use with the hearing impaired, (4) audiometrist training, (5) inservice programs for Head Start teachers, and (6) school psychology inservice. AEAs have purchased and shared expensive equipment for use with the hearing impaired.

Clearly, the number and variety of activities initiated through the Northwest Iowa AEA Cooperative by the Divisions have been many and varied. These activities have greatly expanded the capabilities of each AEA. They have also helped to conserve resources by sharing costs and expertise.

FORMAL PROCEDURES

A set of procedures for cooperative activities has been developed by the Cooperative. These procedures outline (1) how needs will be determined, (2) how proposals will be developed, and (3) what procedures will be used to handle the financial costs of the programs. A formal application process has been developed for applications for new program proposals.

GOVERNANCE

There is a mutually supported governance structure for the Cooperative. A Governing Board is composed of the Chief Administrator of each AEA , one local school superintendent from each AEA, and two Board members from each AEA. This group meets at least two times during the year. Recommendations for consideration by this group come from the Chief Administrators, the Division Director groups, or the Leadership Academy Advisory Committee.

Each of the four AEA Boards has approved a formal Cooperative Agreement which defines the basic framework of the Cooperative. The four Chief Administrators of the Cooperative take turns serving as the Chair for the organization. One of the AEAs serves as fiscal agent for the Cooperative.

SUMMARY

In summary, the Northwest Iowa AEA Cooperative has been very effective. It meets needs which are better met on a multi-AEA level rather than by an individual AEA. The Cooperative is cost effective because of the sharing of expertise, resources, and specialized programs. It is designed to meet those unique needs of our AEAs and local schools which are better met by AEAs working together. It is cooperation at its best because the Cooperative complements and supplements the programs and services of the four quality AEAs. It will never replace the individual AEAs but serves to assist individual AEAs in providing needed services in an efficient and cost effective manner.

ONE REGIONAL AGENCY'S GAME PLAN FOR SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING

by
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When the Executive Director of our three-county regional educational service agency confirmed my promotion to Coordinator of Educational Services, I suddenly realized I had inherited the T.A.P.P. Team, a big, lumbering dinosaur. The Technical Assistance Partnership Program (T.A.P.P.), an attempt to form a team to address the Pennsylvania State Educational Reform, was extinct! Unable to survive in the educational environment of our regional agency, where isolation rather than collaboration had been the norm, had disappeared.

My response after the initial shock was to accelerate evolution by a second team effort, one that would be able to thrive in the jungle of educational change. The membership increased to include all staff addressing any facet of school restructuring. The team crossed department lines thus diminishing barriers between special education services and general fund departments: curriculum and instruction, continuing education, educational planning instructional, material services, nonpublic school services, publications, and data processing. Also, the management team, consisting of the executive director, special education director, and business manager, was encouraged to play an active role.

The new team would address not only issues related to the current educational reform effort but all current, best educational practices. Thus, school restructuring for change addresses all the roles, rules, and relationships within the system.

The new team met to determine their mission, as well as program and service offerings. Group processes and team building activities created unity of purpose and cohesiveness previously unknown to the members. The focus changed from compliance with the current Pennsylvania Educational Reform effort to current, best educational practices and the roles, rules, and relationships in school restructuring. Regular monthly meetings maintain team spirit and address new issues.

Systemic restructuring now includes total educational agency cooperation. Many state educational systems operate with a three echelon school system: state departments of education, regional educational service agencies, and school districts. Some educators are unfamiliar with regional educational service agencies. Pennsylvania's Intermediate Units function as regional service agencies providing a variety of quality programs and services to constituent school districts and have some statewide responsibilities. Extremely large school districts, such as Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, operate on both the second and third echelon; however, the services of

intermediate units are available to four hundred and ninety-nine (499) elementary-secondary schools.

These three levels of state education have different responsibilities. The state agencies, far removed from most districts, have responsibility to develop policies and procedures, along with guidelines for their implementation. On the local level, the primary responsibility is always to educate the students. The regional agencies due in part to their proximity fill the void between these two levels. While the names of these agencies vary and their relationships with member districts may be slightly different, regulatory or service oriented, each has an important role to play. These agencies provide leadership in current educational reform across the nation.

At our Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV, the T.A.P.P. 2 Team members advise on all facets of educational reform efforts of school restructuring: strategic planning, change theory, curriculum development, instructional practices, professional development, instructional materials, state support initiatives, community involvement, and inclusion. Aligning these efforts in a team effort has made T.A.P.P. 2 successful. We are not loose cannons from a state and local perspective.

These enthusiastic team professionals selected three delivery strategies: facilitation, presentation, and technical assistance. By sharing expertise with team members, the players improved the team's communication skills and leadership skills as well.

Another team goal was to provide a model for team building: a direct response to "walk the talk." All these professional players have special expertise in specific positions, thus enabling the organization to be successful. However, to "put points on the board," these team members play together using individual strengths. After initial planning sessions, the team questioned every game plan, as well as every play. After several months of preseason "play," the team was ready for the season opener. When the game began, our team efforts created a winning team of true Super Stars!

A great strength of this team is the member's first-hand knowledge of local school agencies' organization and personnel. Our districts' communities are rural, small town, or small city or a combination. Our twenty-seven districts vary in size and wealth, as well as organizational patterns. Therefore, all services are tailored for specific district needs. In addition, team members provide support and follow-up throughout the entire restructuring process.

The coordinated efforts of some team members assist with selecting and implementing a curriculum model; e.g., performance based education, interdisciplinary curriculum, standards. Other members coach seminars on management issues; e.g., shared decision making, total quality management, site-based management. T.A.P.P. 2 squads provide services related to instructional strategies such as cooperative learning, dimensions of learning, and mastery learning. For example, I conducted cooperative learning training for teachers in one elementary school. A cadre of these teachers and their principal now train other district teams across the entire intermediate unit and state through inservice courses, presentations, and workshops. Other T.A.P.P. 2 staff provide expertise on current supervision models including clinical supervision, peer

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supervision, and differentiated supervision, enabling lead teachers and administrators to initiate peer-coaching and supervision in their respective schools.

Team members also provide specialized educational services. For example, many different players deliver the services necessary for inclusion, the philosophy that all students belong in their regular education classroom and leave only to receive extended opportunities to learn which cannot be provided within their classroom setting. T.A.P.P. 2 players coach district teams in working together to change the delivery system for "special needs" students. Specifically, team members facilitate district teams to incorporate assistive technology, instructional support, and team teaching strategies for meeting special students' needs within regular school programs.

As manager and coach of T.A.P.P. 2, my role includes deciding on team strategies and facilitating specific services in educational practices to assist school district personnel throughout the process. This requires an administrative plan for each school district and vocational-technical school. It also requires a coordinated delivery plan for IU services.

As a team member and restructuring facilitator, my specific position is strategic planner. I facilitate the strategic planning process—a futuristic planning process and discipline mandated in Pennsylvania. When working at a district level, I facilitate the strategic planning committee—representative of all stake holders within the educational community—in developing the strategic plan. At a Futures Conference, this committee clarifies the community's educational beliefs and writes a unique district mission statement addressing the learner. Then, the committee sets priority goals for the next six years. Other community teams subsequently prepare action plans that clearly delineate the specific steps necessary to accomplish these goals.

As the team leader, I am not the STAR, but I facilitate the activities. Rather than directing, I call upon the synergy of the group to deliver success through game plans developed by its members. The secret is respect, trust, and cooperation.

Leading our IU dynamic team of innovative professionals is my personal leadership challenge. I must stay ahead of the dinosaur's successor! It is also my most rewarding professional experience—an opportunity to influence education positively!

PERSPECTIVES

Volume 3, September 1997

A Journal of Research and Opinion
about
EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES

FOCUS

ESA's as Catalysts of Collaboration

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SPECIAL THANKS ARE DUE TO THE STAFF OF THE OAKLAND SCHOOLS INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT IN WATERFORD, MICHIGAN FOR THEIR INVALUABLE ASSISTANCE IN PRODUCING THIS THIRD ISSUE OF *PERSPECTIVES*.

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Introduction

ESAs are changing by the minute. They are driven by the restless search for innovative ideas, new techniques, and pioneering partnerships with other agencies and institutions that are constantly being proposed by creative staff.

They are impacted by the changing state political climate, the fluctuating demand and interests of local school district students and staff, and the growing need to enhance revenue sources without discouraging or disaffecting users.

They must remain true to their essential mission of service and innovation but must constantly adapt to an environment of accelerating change.

Many citizens do not understand the role, contributions, or achievements of ESAs. Most dangerously, as State Senator Al Bauer points out in the interview conducted by Twyla Barnes and Kathy Rorher, many legislators have little experience with them and are therefore prone to see them as resource-wasting excrescences on the educational body.

But, by and large, they endure. They are the quintessential organization for the age of quantum physics. They are sometimes an entity of some substance; at other times they persevere as pure energy, lightning in a bottle, energizing improvement where seemingly no resources exist.

Today's scientists are making daily breakthroughs in understanding the nature of the universe and the essence of life because a foundation of knowledge has been built up over the generations by their predecessors. In an analogous way, knowledge about the nature, role, and functions of service agencies is beginning to build because individuals are accepting the important task of carefully studying ESAs, with all their multiple permutations and combinations. Others are encouraged to help with this important task.

In this issue of Perspectives research plays an important role. Susan Olsen Wallerstein attempts to apply the pioneering research of Bob Stephens and Walt Turner to the complex task of demonstrating with hard data the cost effectiveness/cost efficiency of Connecticut's service agencies in special education transportation. Kay Thomas summarizes a Texas study of all local school districts regarding their attitudes about service agency services. Ruud Gorter gives an international perspective about service agencies with a focus on the Netherlands.

Fostering interagency collaboration has been a prime responsibility of service agencies since their inception, most particularly cooperation among constituent districts. But the growing complexity, if not intractability, of many of the problems facing children and their families has made it necessary for service agencies to work on a larger canvas. Increasingly ESAs are brokering partnerships with social service agencies, local governments, institutions of higher education, and business and industry. The articles by James Redmond and Shelley Yorke Rose, William Bassett, and Cynthia Eagan Martin and Mary Margaret Salls give examples of collaborations that can be, and probably are being, replicated elsewhere.

Other articles look at innovative practices in several areas: gifted and talented (Bruce Vilders), special education (Martin Ikeda and his colleagues and Carmen Iannaccone and Frank Herstek), and at-risk youth (William LeDoux and Anthony Amodeo).

Hopefully, many of our readers will want to join the list of those who are sharing their research and accounts of best practice in this year's edition of Perspectives as AAESA attempts to grow the body of knowledge about service agencies throughout America.

A special work of thanks is due to our new editorial board. They were generous with their time and their suggestions to me and to prospective authors. This edition is clearly better because they were there to help. We again encourage readers to share their ideas and suggestion for improvement with me, with members of the Editorial Board, the Executive Council, or the executive director.

We also encourage ESA chief executives to share copies of Perspectives with agency staff, especially those who might be interested, by reason of their job responsibilities, in some of the specific topics covered in this edition.

Bill Keane
Oakland University
Editor

MOVING TO MARKET-DRIVEN ESAs

by
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WHEN YOUR WORLD TURNS

"When you come to a fork in the road, take it." -- Yogi Berra

Economic, educational, and political realities are causing upheaval in educational service agencies. Nationwide, ESAs are being eliminated, downsized, or underfunded. Where this has not happened, threats loom. Few ESAs are impervious to the winds of change.

Pennsylvania is certainly a case in point. Five years ago intermediate units (IUs) were the well fed of the educational infrastructure. Quietly, we did what we do best, and we steered our own course. Financing was adequate because we simply back-charged districts for their basic special education subsidy, and, since that was never enough, we sent the rest of the bill -- called "excess cost" -- to the state. Ah, the good old days.

But August, 1992 changed all that. With immediate effect all state special education funds were directed to local districts. More importantly, excess costs were eliminated so the state could determine just once a year the funding it could or would provide special education. If districts needed more, they could get it the old fashioned way -- raise local taxes, a power that Pennsylvania intermediate units do not possess. The state's financial obligation for soaring special education programs was now capped.

Districts were now encouraged to look to new ways to offer fiscally-capped, quality special needs programming. They were free to pick from at least three providers: themselves, their regional intermediate unit, or any other public or private agency. Across the state all three options were selected in varying plans. Few districts automatically continued intermediate unit programming. Instead they absorbed hundreds of service agency classes across Pennsylvania, convinced that they could somehow do it cheaper. IU teachers, by law, were offered these district jobs, and hundreds accepted them. Meanwhile, teacher aide, supervisor, and support positions at intermediate units were simply lost -- downsized to proportion with what classes remained.

And all this time we thought they loved us. We paid for that arrogance. Virtually overnight intermediate units in Pennsylvania had to compete for our major stock in trade. It was quickly apparent that what had started as a special education crisis really affected every other IU program. Once people have a choice, they make it. Ask the phone company people, American auto makers, or the lawn service people. All our business functions, from data processing to mass purchasing, all our support services, from pupil transportation to staff development, were now in a marketplace; special education choice immediately infected all other district choices.

Against this paradigm shift Pennsylvania's twenty-nine intermediate units set out to save ourselves. Collectively, we have become the state's best example of educational entrepreneurship. We did it by becoming more market-oriented.

NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION

"In this business you have to be first, best, or different." -- Loretta Lynn

What does market-driven mean? For us, although it is a bit embarrassing to admit, a market-driven orientation required a different focus than our historical approach. Our employees and most district staff always sensed and acted as if we had the corner on all the knowledge and power in special education. We had the "specialists," the "gurus," the legal knowledge of the system, and the "total solution" in special education. Over the years there had developed a tacit understanding that we would control the education of any child whom we identified as needing us. Once the student was "ours," we decided what to provide, cost be damned. While we held all the appropriate conferences, including parents and school district personnel, there was little question about who reigned. The message was clear: We know what we are doing; we are trained professionals; do not try this at home.

To survive in our new circumstances we had to do three things. First, we had to offer more effective and efficient programs. Second, we had to satisfy people with our services. Third, we had to market these services in ways that made them the choice of our local districts.

Marketing is a philosophy and a management process that says, quite simply, "The client is king." Yes, the client. Whether or not some originally found the term distasteful, we now accept that, as in any other business, we are in a marketplace, a bazaar in which items are bartered over, transactions completed, and customer satisfaction the goal. We had to operationalize the "provision of excellence." No longer just a phrase in a dusty old mission statement, the provision of excellence became our watchword. We had to determine what our clients -- students, their families, and their districts of residence -- really wanted. We had to identify, develop, advertise, and provide a value added to our programs that made us the vendor of choice. We had to learn sales techniques, marketplace conditions, and listening skills.

We had to find our marketplace niches. We had to decide if we wanted to feature the lowest price, the best program, or the total solution in every one of our offerings. We had to determine the qualitative floor for each service -- a minimal yet acceptable standard of performance that we were willing to offer. We had to accept that those wanting less than what we would put our professional name on would have to buy elsewhere. We now call this the gentle art of letting go.

We had to learn that quality business is conducted via long term commitment, respect, and accommodation. We had to learn to develop that commitment through effective personal and professional dynamics. But mostly, we had to learn that knowledge of best programming does not automatically translate into the privilege of providing it. Putting aside our own inflated self-worth, we had to learn that customers buy what they perceive they want/need, not what we perceive they want/need.

These components of market-driven services form our definition and application of the term.

THE FINE LINE BETWEEN OPPORTUNITY AND THREAT

The new Golden Rule: He who has the gold makes the rules.

So how does one address the new paradigm? My own organization is typical of most other Pennsylvania IUs. We started with a little knowledge (that is all we had) and a great deal of attitude adjustment for every employee.

In August, 1992 I faced more than 500 employees on opening day, all trembling in unison because they knew that until very recently we employed over 600 people. With a fixed stare they sent me the message of the damned: "You're the boss, you fix it." Well, I stared back, and proclaimed that the only people who could stop the bleeding were looking at me. I pronounced that we had to reinvent ourselves into an organization that focused on customer satisfaction. I stressed that our success would be a result of attitude and orientation. I offered no expectation that we could somehow return to the old days and ways. (Fear, I have decided, is a great motivator.)

We spent the next year arming every custodian, warehouseman, aide, teacher, supervisor, bus driver, and secretary with the concepts of market-driven enterprises. We scheduled a business administration professor from a local university to provide "Marketing 101" to a large cross-section of our staff . She taught us the rudiments of market analysis, effective promotion, and pricing. She lectured on client satisfaction as a core value. She taught us niche marketing concepts and the roles of price, product, promotion, and place. She helped us identify tiny but very effective client satisfaction techniques -- handling telephone calls, personal attention, notes of thanks, follow-up to the sale, trend analysis, etc.

She taught us to think like the customer. She helped us realize that simply "knowing our stuff" would not save us. Because clients will buy what they want, our job was to steer the client in the right direction. She helped us understand that our future lay in our value- added skills, our expertise, our ability to save time and money, and our ability to service our programs better than districts could do otherwise.

This was enormously helpful information, but by itself would not have turned the tide. We had to internalize and apply this information everywhere. Client satisfaction is a way of life, an outlook, and an approach that required every IU representative to offer service, service, service.

We began to recommend and route appropriate books and articles concerning marketing and effective leadership, most of which dealt with life in the private, corporate world. We formed several discussion groups to identify application of the concepts to us. We asked our supervisors to learn more about a service orientation and to share these concepts with their departments. From activities identified in both our strategic and our staff development plans, we emphasized client satisfaction with anyone who received a paycheck from us. I used my bully pulpit to extol its possibilities, preaching that the difference between opportunity and threat is one of perception. We shared useful examples from the general marketplace -- good advertising, quality service, effective niche marketing, and personal experiences, both positive and negative.

These activities seemed to work. Our successes over the recent past are directly attributable to staff in every corner of our operation who have accepted, learned, and practiced a client orientation.

Meanwhile, we reorganized our elaborate "silo-shaped" organization. Our objective was to improve communication both internally and with our clients. Rather than continuing isolated, specialized departments,

we flattened the organization into four areas: central leadership, educational services, business functions, and a "hot house" for new ventures. The latter division is akin to the Saturn Division of General Motors. Few CAIU rules govern new ideas and initiatives; a cross-section of employees leads each effort in the hot house. New ideas are treated with the care given to a new tomato sprout rather than the attention we might give a mature, fruit-bearing plant.

We also went to our customers. I visited every one of our 24 superintendents. Our business manager visited all his district counterparts. Supervisors met with building principals. Classroom teachers -- hundreds of them -- attempted to build strong relationships between their rented school space and the regular education classroom teachers. We presented a customized, district-specific program about our services to the dozen local boards from whom we could wrest an invitation. In all these venues we asked the same closing questions: "What do we currently do well for you?" "What improvements in our service can you suggest?" "How can we help you serve you students and staff more effectively?"

These visits paid huge dividends. We learned much about ourselves and them. We discerned pockets of displeasure and long-standing jealousy. We identified brand new areas of opportunity for us, possible marketplaces that might never have occurred to us.

And they learned something about us. They learned that we cared deeply about the quality of our work. They learned that we were dedicated to service. They recognized our new entrepreneurial spirit and found it refreshing. Our clients saw our intent to remain players in the educational service market. Finally, they began to value what we have long held to be true in regional service agencies -- the strength and quality of concerted and cooperative efforts when districts form consortia.

This is not mostly about fact. This is about attitude change -- attitude change on the parts of both the provider and the recipient. This is about recognizing that the customer owns the right of identifying the "what." The provider gets to identify the "how" and the "how much." That recognition changes everything.

We also embraced the spirit of entrepreneurialism. The supervisor of a defunct program was transformed into our Director of Development. He is charged with identifying new ventures, new markets, and new programs for us. This investment in possible futures was a somewhat controversial move when people expect efforts to control overall overhead costs. But two years later few question the decision. Thus far his leadership has resulted in a drivers education program that saves districts money. He has written numerous grants and had several funded, all of which offer free and direct services to our clients that otherwise would have been unlikely. He heads our regional School-to-Work grant, helping us recreate school curriculum. He has forged partnerships with several local businesses, universities, and agencies.

Local business and arts community involvement in an a regional arts magnet school effort has helped us create a program that will be centered in the local community college. Several area businesses are now providing employee time, financial resources, and educational opportunities for students in their worksites as a result of projects spearheaded by the IU. Other local businesses are now partners in a Gold Star Program that encourages at-risk students to stay in school and to strive for higher grades. These are only a few examples beyond the community ties our School-to-Work initiative is forging. All told, our Director of Development is working in at least ten new arenas; he is just getting started on several more.

For several years I had toyed with the idea of an intermediate unit foundation that could use non-budget dollars to provide humanitarian services to special education youth -- our clients. What better time than

when we needed the visibility and impact such a project could provide? We now promote our ***Champions for Children*** foundation shamelessly. This hot house project features fund-raisers, golf tournaments, and oldies dances. We receive support from local businesses and civic groups around the tri-county area. And best of all, we give money away. We give it to the best projects, the most needy children, and the latest flood or fire victims. We buy computers, assistive devices, eyeglasses, winter coats, and anything else that improves the quality of life of one of our kids. We are known across the community for this opportunity snatched from the jaws of threat.

While all of these ventures must already exist across America, they are new to us. They represent our willingness to try just about anything.

Sometimes we fail. We contracted with a local home for the aged to provide 365 day a year residential occupational and physical therapy. We found that didn't work with 260-day employees. Work during Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter breaks? You have to be kidding! There went a $50,000 pay day. We wanted to store electronically districts' old special education records. They expressed interest. We obtained the equipment; they have yet to sign up and, therefore, pay up.

MY COLLEAGUES WEREN'T SITTING ON THEIR HANDS

It's a poor dog that won't wag its own tail.

Across Pennsylvania other physicians were healing themselves. Several of our IU colleagues started where we did. They scheduled trainers of market-driven concepts. They earnestly began programs of client orientation. They began to parcel programs that used to be "total solutions" into a la carte offerings, each priced to move. Clients could now select only what they desired from a service menu.

One IU developed the first-in-the-state regional program for pregnant and parenting teens, encouraging participants to complete school. The program features tutoring, summer school, a camp, and home visitations. Another IU director expanded his special education transportation system into a contract with an urban district to transport all students. This has been met with a lawsuit filed by the private bus contractors association. We will see how far we can stretch the envelope.

Statewide, the IUs agreed to sponsor a technology mentoring program to help every district develop a larger cadre of electronic experts who could train others. As a group we developed and disseminated better, more client-oriented marketing literature about IUs. We are attempting to communicate more effectively with the Department of Education. We want to help them with state initiatives; we will take on their projects as market-driven enterprises. Meanwhile, small clusters of IUs are forming topical consortia in an effort to harvest the benefits of "super regionalization." Examples are joint purchasing, jointly-sponsored training programs, and technology initiatives.

SO DIFFERENT NOW

A bend in the road is not the end of the road unless you fail to make the turn.

We now provide different special education to districts. Most of our speech therapists are gone, as are teachers of mildly challenged youth. Districts now provide most of these themselves. In 1992 the CAIU budget was $36 million, $13 million of which was special education, the largest single block. We numbered

more than 600 employees. In 1996-97 we still have a $36 million budget, $13 million of it still in special education. However, we now have 500 employees, and the other facets of our operation are growing while special education has changed areas of emphasis. If it is no bigger in size or budget, it is more varied. Where we do not provide the classroom teacher, we often contract technical assistance, and testing and psychological services. We are leading inclusion efforts of our districts, in effect helping to work ourselves out of a job. It is the right thing to do, and any effect on the IU has to be secondary. We have established a clinic, a central, one-stop referral service that works not only with districts but with people directly off the street. Incidentally, we are making money on this venture.

Elsewhere, we have dedicated another person to curriculum/staff development. This specialist is our employee, but she works in three small districts that jointly pay her salary for various portions of her time. She leads initiatives important to them, not us. We have offered the same arrangement in business management and legal functions; district dynamics have so far kept that from happening. Last year we hosted more than 44,000 visitors who attended our expanded staff development offerings. The topics are usually identified by our clients, thus ensuring attendance.

And so it goes in all arenas. In some places it is change; in others it is growth. We do not fear competition. We have found that we can lead and compete very nicely. New ideas come to us daily as both employees and customers look at new programs. We offer our districts attractive services and then wait for them to see the benefits. We strive to be in front of the idea development curve. It is all rather exciting. Few of us would now desire a return to "the good old days."

A SUMMARY OF LEARNINGS

Experience is what you get when you didn't get what you wanted.

So, what have we learned from all this? I offer the following :

1. Loretta Lynn speaks volumes for educational service agencies. We now select the stance we will take on any venture: Do we want to be first with the service? That is a good position. Sometimes, however, we cannot be first, so we try to be best. That is good, too. But often we simply do business differently than our clients/customers. This provides us with strategic advantage. As the educational community begins to respond more vigorously to our public's call for school improvement, that difference may be how schools will do business. We will be waiting for them.

2. We value nimbleness. We spin off and market new ideas very quickly. We do not allow our internal organization, the unknown, or the inevitable politics to hamper our rapid response to an identified need. We pull together, and we pull fast.

3. We are no longer holier than thou. Anybody can do just about anything; we ourselves are proof of that. We work closely with our clients to lead them to the right place, whether we get to play or not.

4. Client/customer satisfaction dominates our marketing plan. Client satisfaction is a combination of product, service, sales, and price. Our value added is service. We do whatever it takes to satisfy our clients. This is a guarantee which we always honor, sometimes at considerable expense to us.

5. Market-driven attitudes include continual organizational growth. Seeking constant improvement, quality businesses attempt to become what Senge would term "learning organizations."

6. Success requires commitment beyond that of the leader. While most of our staff have become adept at finding and developing opportunities, a few simply still don't "get it." Invariably, when we fail to make a client happy, these are the employees involved.

7. Life in this business is not without travail. Some efforts will fail. When they do, we like to think that we are failing forward.

8. There is value in holding hands. The IUs in Pennsylvania are unified. We draw strength from the work of our colleagues, and we are constantly seeking ways to collaborate in joint problem-solving. If we hang, we shall certainly hang together.

Perhaps none of this is of importance to my colleagues around the country. Perhaps many have every reason to expect life to go on as usual. But if someone happens to wake up some August morning to find the money stream has dried up, these considerations of market-driven services may be useful.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS... PUBLIC PRIDE: A COUNTY SHOWCASE

by
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and
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On February 2, 1997, more than 60,000 people gathered at today's town square – a shopping mall – in Waterford, Michigan for the largest public show of support for public schools in Oakland County's – and Michigan's – history. What could bring about such an overwhelming statement of a community's support for its schools?

Oakland County public schools, like many other fine public education institutions throughout the country, contribute daily to the quality of life for every citizen in the community. The "Public Schools... Public Pride" (PSPP) event provided 60,000 taxpayers the chance to see, in one place, the many exemplary programs and services provided daily to Oakland County's 200,000 students by the dedicated educators in the 28 local school districts.

"Public Schools... Public Pride" actually began on November 29, 1995 following a standing room only rally in support of public schools at Oakland Schools, the intermediate school district serving the 28 local school districts in Oakland County. In partnership with the Oakland County Superintendents Association and Oakland County School Boards Association, Oakland Schools hosted an invitation-only rally to empower Oakland County's educational community to speak up for their schools. Empowerment kits, including accurate information to debunk commonly held myths about public education, were provided for the more than 3,000 people who packed the ISD's halls. "Public Schools... Michigan's Choice" heightened public awareness of the common goals of equity and excellence for every child in Oakland County.

A series of debriefing sessions and the formation of a Next Steps committee led to the recommendation that a similar event be held again the following year. Realizing the need to expand the scope and find a suitable site to accommodate more participants led to the recommendation that a large shopping mall be used for the next event. With this basic concept in mind, a new planning committee was formed to work with the event's new coordinator.

The committee agreed to build on the suggestions from the previous year's rally to create a unique event that would showcase, in a collaborative manner, the best practices of Oakland County's public schools. Planning meetings began in September, 1996 and included a broad range of participants. To demonstrate how the quality of Oakland County's schools enhances the quality of life for Oakland County residents, the decision was made to involve not only the intermediate school district, superintendents and school boards associations but also the Oakland County government, Oakland Community College, Oakland University, businesses, parent groups, and the Michigan Education Association. Representatives of each of these stakeholders committed to a series of meetings, resources, and personnel, to make "Public Schools... Public Pride" a reality.

Preliminary discussions with a few of the major shopping malls in Oakland County quickly bore fruit and Summit Place in Waterford, a site at the geographic center of the county, agreed to be the host site. Their marketing manager became a key person in developing the concept and handling the logistics of accommodating our early estimate of 10,000 guests.

A major planning concern was finding the best date and time for the event. February 2, Groundhog Day, was chosen after reviewing dates of major sport schedules and other local events. The committee recognized that winter weather in Michigan is always a wild card and collectively decided that February 2, while probably cold, would not be allowed to be otherwise inclement! The event was slated for the hours that the mall is normally open on Sunday, from Noon to 6 PM.

With title, theme, site, and date decided upon, the next steps were to translate the planning into action. The Planning Committee subdivided into teams who were responsible for:

- Exhibits
- Publicity/media
- Student performances
- "Stuffed students" (handmade dolls from every school)
- One-day mall retailer rebate to the 28 school districts
- Parent volunteers
- Afterglow for event workers
- Gala for VIPs following the event
- Infrastructure - wiring, computer hookups, etc.
- Long range planning team for follow-up
- Celebrity letters to special teachers and photos
- Decorations
- Mall involvement.

Each team was coordinated by at least one Oakland Schools staff member and one school district, community college, university, government, or parent volunteer. The team leaders were encouraged to supplement their skills with those of other volunteers.

Following the initial planning meeting, the teams began work on their own: planning, setting goals, making contacts and regularly checking in with the PSPP coordinator to create an effective information flow. Because of the constant flow of information to all stakeholders, ideas blossomed and grew and new ideas were formed that continually improved the event. The following is a brief look at some of the teams' efforts.

EXHIBITS

Once it was decided to fill the mall with exhibits led by students demonstrating selected district best practices, exhibit team leaders created major themes around which to cluster the interactive displays. With guidance from the Oakland County Superintendents Association, they decided against separate exhibits by each of the 28 school districts and instead grouped a few districts together around each of the themes:

- Curriculum and Instruction
- Programs

- At-risk
- Partnerships
- Activities/Clubs
- Beyond K-12
- Community Support
- Technology

The exhibit team worked closely with mall management on setup and traffic flow. The team worked with district contact people to coordinate their display planning. It was expected that booths would be staffed in shifts.

STUFFED STUDENTS

Suggested by district fine arts coordinators, the "stuffed students" were quickly translated from concept to reality. Using donated fabric, Oakland Schools staff cut out more than 400 student "bodies" that were sent, with instructions, to every public school building in Oakland County. Teachers, parents, administrators, support staff, and/or students were asked to sew and stuff these "students," then creatively clothe and decorate them to represent their building. The results were unexpectedly powerful. Individually, each student is a unique work of art. Together, grouped on specially built play structures at Summit Place, the "stuffed students" represented the diversity – and promise – of Oakland County's student population. Safely shipped back to their districts following PSPP, the "stuffed students" are proudly on display in their local schools and board offices.

PUBLICITY/MEDIA

The publicity and media team immediately set to work crafting the event's message, working with local district communications coordinators to get the word out, and building relationships with the media. Valuable partnerships were forged with the Oakland Press, a newspaper serving the bulk of the county, which agreed to run a series of ads for PSPP at no charge. WJR, a popular Detroit radio station, produced a series of public service announcements (PSAs) that aired for weeks before the event. FOX 2 television also produced and ran a series of PSAs promoting the event. The publicity and media team also crafted a one minute video PSA that was produced by Oakland Schools staff, duplicated and sent to every educational access cable station serving Oakland County. The PSA also ran on the Oakland Schools Television Network that sends programming to schools throughout Oakland County. These key media placements ensured major market promotion and coverage of the event.

Local cable stations were also asked to use this PSA as a satellite insert for any otherwise unused airtime on stations such as MTV, CNN, the Family Network, and others. Four of the county's cable companies complied with this request and, as a result, many more television viewers were reached.

Oakland Schools requested special support from the county government that resulted in the County Executive, L. Brooks Patterson, proclaiming the week of February 2 – 8 as "Public Schools and Family Matters" week. Tying together PSPP with the Family Matters Conference, held the following weekend and also sponsored by the Oakland Press, Oakland Schools, Oakland Community College, and other social service agencies, provided effective cross-marketing.

Promotion of PSPP was not limited to traditional print, television and radio. The Internet was used and many home pages that post events throughout Michigan were asked to include PSPP. A special section on the Oakland Schools homepage was created for PSPP press releases, updates, and a note of thanks to everyone who worked on this event.

Other methods of reaching the public were also used. District communications coordinators were asked to "dribble" information about PSPP in their district, community, staff, and school newsletters, cable TV programs, and other communication vehicles for months prior to the event. They worked with school principals to post signs on school marquees for the week leading up to PSPP. This group was integral to the success of communicating the many messages that evolved.

An Oakland Schools graphics intern created the design that eventually graced much of the promotional materials, including the thousands of buttons that were produced by students with mental and physical impairments at Visions Unlimited, a local vocational training center. Thanks to a much-appreciated donation from Delphi Automotive, Inc., the buttons were generously handed out for a month prior to the event. They continue to grace coats and jackets throughout Oakland County today.

Another corporate sponsor, Elias Brothers, covered the costs for printing thousands of placemats that were used at local restaurants. The placemats promoted the event and noted points of pride about our public schools.

We were also fortunate to be able to advertise PSPP at two hockey games at the Palace of Auburn Hills. Thousands of flyers were handed out by Palace staff and PSPP information was boldly displayed on their enormous video screens throughout the games.

A variety of print materials were made available to PSPP guests on February 2. A beautiful, three color program was produced, underwritten by the Chrysler Corporation, that explained PSPP in detail and provided a comprehensive guide to the exhibits, as well as useful contact names and telephone numbers for follow-up information.

STUDENT PERFORMANCES

Educators know that one way to attract people to an event is to have lots of student performances; relatives and friends don't want to miss an opportunity to see their children perform. Student performances also generated great interest among those present who enjoyed a quality vocal, dance, instrumental, or drama performance by creative kids! More than 60 student performances were offered throughout the day that had mall visitors tapping their feet, smiling, and thinking about the excellent performing arts instruction available to Oakland County students.

In addition to the many fine live performances, students also demonstrated other skills in the Student Art Exhibit, featuring hundreds of student works of art in a variety of media and in the Student Video Display that ran student-created videos throughout the day.

CHILD CARE

Much of PSPP's success was attributed to the outstanding free child care in the mall provided by the Waterford School District. Using a large playroom designed for special events for children, licensed child

care workers, preschool teachers and co-op students cared for more than 210 children, ages 2-6, throughout the day. Families were identified by Polaroid photos and matching wrist bracelets were put on the children and their parents to match up everyone efficiently.

SHOPPING INCENTIVES

PSPP not only targeted parents but also the other 81% of our community who do not have children in our public schools. Incentives, other than those that we knew would attract parents, were developed with the Summit Place mall manager. Special sales, prize drawings and a one percent rebate of the day's gross revenues were offered. To return this amount to the 28 districts in an equitable way, a formula that allocated funds in proportion to the number of people identifying themselves as representing a certain district to that district's actual student count was devised. For example, 100 people identified with one of our districts with a smaller student head count could compete favorably with 200 or more people from a larger school district.

The day's profits returned to each of the districts are being compounded by a special back-to-school sale and rebate scheduled for August. Shoppers were also eligible to pick up a free canvas tote bag decorated with the PSPP logo with a minimum purchase of $50 anywhere in the mall. The 500 bags, donated by Summit Place, were gone long before the event ended.

PARENTS

Parents play a key role in their children's education. Bringing together representatives of the many parent groups that support their schools was critical to the event's success. Contact was made with every district's PTA and PTO councils and other parent advisory groups in an effort to attract parent volunteers to act as hosts for the event and to participate in the parent booth set up to offer parents a variety of ways in which to participate in their children's education. Parents for Public Schools, a national organization of grassroots chapters dedicated to recruiting students, involving parents, and improving public schools, was present at the booth.

Parent involvement is an area targeted for future development by the PSPP long-range planning committee. Strategies to mobilize parents on a county-wide level around a number of major educational issues are an outgrowth of the event.

VOLUNTEERS

Parents weren't the only hosts and volunteers on February 2. Many National Honor Society students swelled the ranks of volunteers who included local teachers, college students, staff, administrators and board members. The more than 1,000 volunteers were essential to our efficient setup, greeting the continuous stream of visitors, directing traffic, running errands throughout the day, troubleshooting, and dismantling of the displays.

PARTICIPANTS' ROOM

Using an empty storefront, we created a nerve center for PSPP. Volunteers stopped by to check in and pick up their host ribbons, members of the press were directed there to pick up their press kits, and a key group

of roving troubleshooters checked in regularly with the staff. The Participants' Room was particularly effective for finding key people, replenishing printed materials throughout the mall, and answering questions before they could become problems.

GALA AND AFTERGLOW

A gathering like PSPP provided an excellent opportunity for legislators and government officials to greet their constituents. Many came out during the day and still others attended a special gala held in their honor in the mall's community room just following the event. This provided an opportunity for these VIPs, as well as corporate sponsors, business leaders, school administrators, board members, and community college and university officials, to get together for 30 minutes to discuss the importance of our schools to our communities and American democracy. After a brief welcome and address, invited guests and event volunteers were treated to a delicious dinner donated by Unique Food Corporation and the Summit Place mall.

The afterglow was a time to unwind, relax, and talk about the many successes and few snags of PSPP for those who spent an exhausting but fulfilling day, a day filled with the sharing of what is right about Oakland County's public schools.

LONG RANGE PLANNING

Initially approximately 10,000 people were expected to attend PSPP. When more than 60,000 people come to support and learn more about Oakland County's public schools, an instant measure of success was established. The event itself is only part of a larger effort to underscore the importance of public education's role in supporting American democracy. "Public Schools... Public Pride" reached out to the Oakland County community as a demonstration of the importance of the public education system to the quality of life for everyone who lives and works there.

Oakland Schools was proud to play a central role in coordinating PSPP. An area service agency is in an ideal position to serve as a facilitator for increasing the public awareness of the role of education in the community. The efforts can seem daunting at times but the results are worth the commitment. The PSPP event redefined Oakland County's sense of public education.

The long range planning committee will use PSPP as a springboard to translate ideas into action. Relationships forged by PSPP will be used to build further efforts to bring equity and excellence in education to every student in Oakland County.

USING ESAs AS CATALYSTS FOR INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

by
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America's children are caught in an unprecedented crisis of well-being:

- Too may suffer physical or emotional neglect in dysfunctional and/or impoverished families;
- Too many, for reasons both complex and varied, do poorly in school;
- Too many are diverted into crime, drug use and early pregnancy.

Children who cannot think through their futures, plan ahead with confidence, and acquire the skills in school to become competent and employable adults are likely to lead unhappy, troubled lives and eventually to become burdens, rather than contributors, to society.

New York State is attempting to meet this vital challenge head-on with a massive collaborative effort to change a tragically bleak picture to one of hope and promise for every child. The State Education Department and the Board of Regents, the State Department of Health and the United Way of New York — all operating under the leadership of Education Commissioner Richard Mills — have entered into a joint agreement to promote inter-agency collaboration toward the goal of moving the well-being of young people to the top of community, state and national agendas.

The initial thrust of this commitment will be to ensure the readiness of children to enter school. New York has, for many years, used the Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (popularly known as BOCES) to provide a variety of services to local schools and children. The 38 BOCES are now being asked to serve as lead agencies for local efforts to foster, promote and develop action plans to deliver and support early intervention strategies. This age group — prenatal through age six — has been targeted because these are the critical years when children develop their physical, social, emotional, intellectual, cognitive, spiritual and imaginative skills and attitudes that enable them to reach their maximum potential.

Fortunately, the Orange-Ulster BOCES, located in Goshen, New York — about 65 miles northwest of New York City — has been working on interagency collaboration since 1992. At that time key policy- and decision-makers in the county, representing agencies that deal with children and families, were first brought together by the Orange-Ulster BOCES District Superintendent to discuss how their constituencies might be better served through their collaborative efforts. They decided to form an Orange County Team that would meet regularly to review relevant issues and to agree on specific actions or activities to improve the condition of children and families in the county.

The County Team was made up of the following individuals:

- The District Superintendent of Schools (CEO of BOCES)
- Local school superintendents
- The Commissioner of Social Services
- The Commissioner of Mental Health
- The Commissioner of Health
- A Family Court Judge
- Representatives of
  - –Probation Department
  - –Youth Bureau
  - –County Legislature
  - –State Senator's Office
  - –Boards of Education
  - –Parents

Key to the success of the Orange County Team was a commitment by the policy makers and administrative leaders to attend meetings so that decisions could be made quickly and efficiently. The team, coordinated by the office of the District Superintendent of the Orange-Ulster BOCES, where the initiative was originally conceived, has fostered open communications, the elimination of turf issues and a great deal of trust and good will among the agencies involved.

Through its "action" sub-committee called C.A.S.T. (Committee for Schools and Agencies Together) it has produced an Electronic Data Base of county-wide programs to serve schools, agencies, students and families; a system of Site-based Services at several school districts and the BOCES; and a Network case management system to deal cooperatively with very difficult or complex cases that have not been satisfactorily resolved at the local level.

This successful history together has created an inclusive environment and infrastructure which favorably positioned the Orange-Ulster BOCES and the County Team to welcome the Orange County United Way to the table for the local component of the expanded collaboration on behalf of children.

The New York State early intervention effort is called Partners for Children and in our county we are calling our program Orange County Partners for Children.

Support is coming from many directions. County Executive Joseph Rampe, for example, in his annual State of the County Address in January, for the first time spoke of the critical need to "prepare our children for the future." He pledged to appoint a citizens' panel composed of parents; educational, business, medical and religious leaders; and community service organization representatives to be charged with the development of a plan to prepare children for responsible adulthood.

We come together at local and state level out of our shared perception of the need to improve the lives of our young people, but we also act with confidence that considerable research confirms that need and attests to the effectiveness of early intervention.

We know, for example, that:

- Educational problems of disadvantaged children are perceptible long before formal education begins;
- Twenty years of research on preschool education have proven the efficacy of early intervention in assuring success in school and other future endeavors;
- Preventing early failure through programs for parents and children is, in the long term, less costly to individuals and society than remediating.

Thus our progress toward our immediate goal of assuring readiness for school in the under-six population will be measured by a number of indicators:

- gains in the percentage of completed immunizations
- improvement in the percentage of vision or hearing defects corrected
- the absence of preventable or treatable health problems
- school readiness as observed by teachers

As this article is being written, the New York State Education Department has scheduled a satellite teleconference to launch the state-wide initiative throughout New York.

Education Commissioner Richard Mills has also scheduled appearances at various forums throughout the state to participate in local kick-off ceremonies; the one in Orange County will take place at a joint meeting of our two county-wide chambers of commerce, with the idea of enlisting the backing of the business/ industry community.

Each school or agency partner is prepared to contribute to this massive effort. Information, time, models of successful strategies, publicity and networking are among the immediate resources that have been pledged. Eventually, of course, monetary resources can be redirected and leveraged for even more support.

Our vision is not a modest one. Our long-range goals include:

- healthy births, as evidenced by declining rates of low birth weight babies and births to school-age parents, and reductions in instances of inadequate prenatal care;
- increasing school success, as evidenced by academic achievement measures, improved attendance, higher graduation rates, more transitions to higher education or employment, and lower suspension rates;
- a decline in rates of school-age pregnancy, substance abuse, juvenile delinquency and criminal behavior; and
- family stability, as evidenced by higher rates of safe and supportive living environments; fewer families living below the poverty line; better employment opportunities and reduced instances of child neglect and abuse.

Some tentative conclusions are possible at this launching point:

Having the County Team structure in place for broad-based collaboration was undoubtedly a great advantage to this area when the New York State Commissioner of Education turned to the BOCES units to take leadership roles in the joint state-wide endeavor. But, of course, any state that has ESAs already has a locus of infrastructure for collaboration, leadership and change.

State-level and national support is undoubtedly another advantage. It provides backing for local partners, political clout and various resources, including funds. It strengthens and widens the local reach.

The initial steps toward Interagency Collaboration are not easy. In New York, as everywhere, there are turf issues at each turn and just the coordination of so many players and bureaucracies can seem staggering at the outset. However, with a good faith commitment to improve services, reduce duplication of efforts and boost cost-effectiveness so as to maximize the impact of scarce funding, the idea soon took on a life and momentum of its own.

The rewards of collaboration have been many: a renewed sense of the power of cooperation and a re-doubled dedication to the future of our youth are surely the most satisfying of the early ones, with the promise of more to come as a new generation grows up healthy and ready for responsible, fulfilling lives.

REACHING AGREEMENT: BUILDING CAPACITY IN EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCIES FOR INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

by
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Service Agencies such as Region XIII Education Service Center in Austin, Texas are called upon to provide coordination, planning and leadership to diverse groups and agencies in the pursuit of collaborative agreement. The increased requirement for collaborative planning to access services and grant funding has encouraged educators, government agencies, social service providers and community members to come together to plan for a wide variety of purposes.

This interest in collaboration does not insure a quality product or experience, however. The time and facilitation skills needed to productively engage a diverse group representing different disciplines and interests are often not available in the public school or public entities developing such collaborations. Service agencies can fill this need with qualified, knowledgeable staff with the organizational and process skills needed to support such collaborative projects. The role of the service agency becomes one of facilitator of the group process as opposed to the traditional trainer or content expert role. In this role, service agencies provide the process expertise and management to allow client groups to problem solve and implement their own initiatives. School districts in many cases prefer to utilize their own staff for content expertise and are often resistive to outside experts who they feel do not know the individual district needs as well as they do. The service agency is in a unique position to cause client agencies and participants to think and problem solve beyond their individual interests and experiences without dictating the outcome or content of the discussions.

In this new relationship with client groups, the leadership role of service agencies changes to one of a mentor model. The mentor model requires a broader focus on the interaction between education issues and community and societal concerns. This focus by the service agency can serve to connect the education client groups more meaningfully to their local constituents. This brings into partnership with school district and education service agencies the valuable community resources and agencies which traditionally have competed for tax revenue, charitable contributions, community support and political influence.

When service agencies support initiatives which the client district wants to lead, opportunities are created to build relationships leading to future services and to gather information which functions as valuable needs assessment data for emerging trends in client districts.

BENEFITS TO CLIENT/EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCY RELATIONSHIPS

One example of a key support role played by an education service agency is a project which Education Service Center Region XIII has been facilitating for the past year in Travis County. This county was faced with a state mandate to develop a county wide Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Center (JJAEC). This program would impact the juvenile justice service providers, children's mental health providers and all school districts whose students resided in or committed offenses within the borders of this county. Education Service Center Region XIII staff had established relationships with these school districts and service agencies through participation and leadership in a wide variety of programs and services addressing the needs of students and families in special populations served by multiple agencies. Superintendents of each district attended meetings at Region XIII for districts in this county, but this group did not have a specific focus other than information sharing. Prior to this project, none of the districts involved had identified a need or purpose common to all where resources were shared and all districts, regardless of size or wealth, benefited equally. As a result of this year long collaborative project, which was organized, facilitated and supported by Education Service Center Region XIII, several positive outcomes have occurred.

Despite an extremely short time frame for planning, the Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Center opened on time. It had been developed with full participation of all stake holders. The program recently received an Exemplary Program Award from the Texas Correction Association. All participants from the seven primary school districts and county agencies have remained involved and are currently evaluating the program for revision for the new year. The role of the service center continues to be focused on problem solving and facilitating communication with the leadership of the partners involved addressing their common goals.

As a partner in this collaboration Education Service Center Region XIII was requested to provide an additional service to this collaborative, to serve as contract agent and fiscal agent for the educational and operational aspects of the JJAEC. This activity, in turn, opened the door to the development of additional fiscal and program services for individual partnerships between parties from this group. This allowed the ESC to participate with client districts in a new capacity which had not been developed in any other context. The flexibility and capacity of a service agency to respond to such opportunities is a key part of the value added to clients.

The superintendents in this county-wide group have a comfortable working relationship around this program which is leading to the development of additional mutually beneficial projects and services with the Education Service Center. In these new initiatives Region XIII is again serving as both facilitator and partner. These clients now perceive the greater potential of the Education Service Center for providing services in facilitating problem solving around district issues and collaboratives in the community across multiple areas.

The relationship between the Education Service Center Region XIII Executive Director, the ESC staff and the seven district superintendents, as well as their designees, has been enhanced through this experience.

Additional benefits to some of the client districts have also developed as a result of this partnership with county services. Districts have been able to work with social service agencies to focus distribution of county resources to high need areas with input from the schools. Two districts have accessed First Time

Offender services to support their efforts in developing safe schools. All seven districts will be involved in substance abuse prevention curriculum. Two districts with city and county government agencies are developing neighborhood services to support families and children.
This partnership offers the additional value of connecting professionals who hold common goals and values and pools everyone's funding, industry/technology and human service assets. While these entities previously would have competed for dwindling resources, they now find that an alliance results in more comprehensive planning, more economical services and strategic changes in delivery models.

The school districts have an increased presence now at the table in multiple forums involving funding and programs which support school initiatives. Some of the smaller districts, which previously were underserved by county services, have begun to develop a stronger voice through this partnership where districts do not compete with each other for services but plan for the benefit of all parties over time.

UNDERLYING CONDITIONS/ASSUMPTIONS FOR SUCCESS

For a service agency to be successful in facilitating cooperative endeavors as a multidisciplinary, multi-agency project, several conditions and assumptions must be present at all levels of the organization.

Condition 1: The ESA must model for clients the strategies and structures which foster problem solving, individual leadership, communication skills, collaboration skills and inclusive decision making.

Condition 2: Service agency staff must have a broad base of training and experience in group facilitation, conflict resolution, strategic planning and problem solving models. Successful facilitation which results in achieving the purpose and outcomes of the client group requires the facilitator to create problem solving structures using tools and processes which meets the demands imposed by group dynamics. Staff must be able to design and adapt these planning and process tools to meet the skill level and time constraints of the client participants. The staff must be skillful in the neutral facilitator role while connecting participant beliefs and values to the decision making process.

Condition 3: Leadership in the service agency must allocate resources and staff to participate in interagency partnerships which may not be directly mandated or funded but which lay the ground work for such collaborations. A balance must be maintained between allocating resources to content and program specific activities and providing services which continue to stimulate forums in which new opportunities may develop.

Education Service Center Region XIII works toward these conditions through collaborative planning and independent, multi-department work teams throughout the organization.

BUILDING ON PRIOR COMMITMENTS AND RELATIONSHIPS

For many years, ESC consultants have supported and participated in many social service and community service arenas. ESC XIII has provided leadership and partnership support to efforts through the state Children's Mental Health Plan, Community Resource Coordination Groups, Job Training Partnership Act work force, school boards, business organizations, parent/community organizations, Juvenile Justice agencies, civic/county neighborhood groups, and Education Service Center Region XIII's own focus and user groups. Traditionally, this effort has concentrated on the larger urban communities, but the benefits of such connections and partnerships benefit smaller and more rural communities as well. This increased

coverage will require additional resources, which must be part of the Education Service Center Region XIII strategic plan for client service.

The capacity to build on prior commitments and relationships in new situations requires that service agency staff from different departments and content/program areas work together. A primary focus in these partnerships is the development of relationships with professionals in all fields who have decision making responsibility and can provide key resources and influence in partnerships with clients.

Education Service Center Region XIII has played many different roles in the past twenty years. The newest role, that of facilitator and mentor for systemic change, is both challenging and rewarding for an education service agency and for its clients. Current dynamics in schools and communities caused by state legislation and dwindling resources have forced local education agencies and community agencies to work together. This situation provides an opportunity for education service agencies to look at the long term potential for their involvement in the collaborative development of education, health and human services for children and families through the educational arena.

CLIENT VIEWS OF TEXAS SERVICE CENTERS: RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM THE SERVICE CENTERS 2000 STUDY

by
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THE SERVICE CENTERS 2000 STUDY

Service Centers 2000, a year-long initiative co-sponsored by Texas Regional Education Service Centers (ESCs) and the Commissioner of Education, combines the insights of school district administrators, instructional staff, professional development experts, ESCs, and the commissioner with market analyses to understand the organization, operation, activities, and governance of Texas service centers.

During the spring of 1996, all 1050 Texas school districts were surveyed about their use of ESCs. The questionnaire used in the survey appears at the end of this article. Sixty percent of the 627 districts from all twenty Texas ESC regions returned questionnaires. Responding districts resembled Texas districts overall in size and in geographic distribution: half came from school districts with enrollment under 1,000 and more than two-thirds identified their district as rural. Responding districts enroll approximately 2.5 million Texas students, roughly 69% of the state's total enrollment.

FINDINGS FROM THE STATEWIDE SURVEY

The overwhelming majority of responding districts are using their ESC, with more than 85% using their ESC constantly or quite regularly. Over half of districts reported that their use of ESC programs and services has increased over the past two years. Nearly three-fourths of districts reported that they depend on their ESC often or absolutely need their ESC for training, support, and information.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Districts that use ESC programs and services rated them as better than average or very high in value. Instructional services valued most highly include instructional media and training, and assistance in math, reading, and writing instruction as well as in TAAS (the state testing program) strategies. Non-instructional services valued most highly include administrative data processing, financial accounting, purchasing cooperatives, and bus driver training. Also of great importance to responding school districts is information on laws and rules governing their operation. Services such as job banks, teleconferencing and distance learning, textbook displays, and training and services for parents were less frequently identified as having high value but are still used by many school districts.

QUALITY

Client school districts are highly satisfied with the quality of their ESCs. Three-quarters of respondents reported that their ESC has a strong, responsive organization that provides them with high-quality and

current information. ESCs received high marks from 71% or more of respondents on the quality of their organization, responsiveness, staff, operations, and the degree to which ESCs are up to date regarding school matters.

USE

Forty-one percent of all respondents said they absolutely need their ESC and could not get along without it, while an additional 33% reported that they often depend on the ESC. Small district clients said they are currently using ESC programs and services more often than mid-sized and large districts. The smaller the district size category, the greater the increase in ESC use over the past two years. Small districts depend on ESCs more than larger districts for programs such as reading and math training and assistance, instructional and administrative data processing, financial accounting, and instructional and purchasing cooperatives. Mid-sized districts are more dependent than other districts on ESCs for training and assistance in special education. Larger districts are more dependent than other districts on ESCs for training and assistance in bilingual education, for assistance for low-performing campuses, and for alternative certification programs.

An overwhelming majority of respondents, 82% or more, indicated that their ESC helps districts function more efficiently by providing relatively inexpensive training and services, by facilitating cooperatives, and by providing programs and services that might otherwise be inaccessible to them because of their high capital costs. Over two-thirds of respondents indicated that ESC programs for training and certifying new teachers increase efficiency, while one-third cited distance learning programs offered by ESCs as important for reducing their costs.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

The regional advisory committee of superintendents is the communication channel used most frequently by districts for providing feedback and input to ESCs. Surveys conducted by ESCs and visits by field service agents are also common links between districts and ESCs.

CONCERNS

When provided an opportunity to respond to open-ended questions about ESCs, respondents most frequently commend them for efficient and effective service. Respondents already use numerous technology-based services and would like the ESCs to have more expertise with leading edge technology. Several respondents note that ESC staff are most effective when they have direct contact with educators at the campus level. Another concern among school districts is the rising cost of ESC services and programs. Respondents link rising costs to insufficient funding from the state and imposition of underfunded mandates. Some respondents attribute rising costs to efforts by ESCs to become market driven. Many respondents hope that additional state resources to service centers will allow them to hire and retain high-quality staff and keep service fees relatively low.

FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

Focus group meetings of school district personnel in six cities across Texas addressed, in depth, critical issues related to services and the role of ESCs. Focus group participants discussed experiences with a variety of service providers and service needs to improve student performance and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of school district operations. Six general topic areas were discussed: mission,

accountability, governance, ESC relations with state and local education entities, experience with services, and strengths and weaknesses.

1. THE MISSION OF THE EDUCATION SERVICE CENTERS

Focus group participants see the primary mission of the ESCs as service to school districts. They believe that nothing should compromise or constrain that role. In particular, school district personnel do not want ESCs serving a regulatory or monitoring role. Clients believe that ESC services and expertise should match district needs, requiring flexibility in providing and delivering services. In addition to services, school districts expect ESCs to be facilitators that bring school districts together to solve problems. Participants believe that ESCs have a mission to improve school district efficiency and reduce districts' costs. They see a role for ESCs in providing innovative services for school districts as well as charting the future of change in education.

2. ACCOUNTABILITY

Participants criticized the current state accountability system, which holds each ESC accountable for student performance within its region. Numerous concerns fed this criticism including the fact that school districts do not use services equally and resources are unevenly spread among service centers. Focus group participants prefer an accountability system devised by client school districts. Measuring time spent with districts and appropriate use of feedback from client districts were two approaches suggested by participants to measure ESC accountability. Participants from small districts in particular were not enthusiastic about market mechanisms for ensuring accountability.

3. GOVERNANCE

ESC governance is not an area of concern for their clients. Clients who expressed an opinion were satisfied with how the governing boards function. Governance was linked to management in the minds of many focus group participants, and they expressed their belief that input to ESCs is an important element for efficient and responsive operation. Most participants knew of many avenues for input to the ESC and expressed a desire to keep lines of communication open. Participants viewed the current composition of the ESC board as appropriate.

4. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ESCS, SCHOOL DISTRICTS, AND THE TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY

The relationship between ESCs and school districts is healthy and well understood in most regions. Districts want to provide feedback and discuss their needs with the ESCs and most have many opportunities to do so. ESCs are using multiple forms of communication which allow for different input from various individuals. Communication problems that exist are attributed in equal part to ESC staff and local district staff. The relationship between ESCs and Texas Education Agency appears to school personnel to be less well defined than it used to be. Many participants simply do not understand the relationship very well. The process of moving TEA functions to ESCs has caused some confusion because school districts are not certain to whom they should turn for information. For example, focus group participants expressed frustration with the uncertainty about and lack of information concerning new laws and rules. They want authoritative answers to questions but seem to have difficulty getting such responses.

5. SCHOOL DISTRICT SERVICE NEEDS AND ESC PARTICIPATION

Most focus group participants have found training and assistance in the ESC core service areas to be of great use. The importance of services and assistance to smaller districts was noted repeatedly by participants. However, participants criticized some services they have received as being of unacceptable quality. The quality of people providing services at the ESC varies among the regions and sometimes within an ESC. School districts are aware of and troubled by these quality differences.

School districts receive a wide variety of services beyond the core from the ESCs. Some participants noted that ESCs should seize the opportunity to be innovative. They noted that some service centers are good at initiating changes within districts while others are good at reacting to changes. What appears to be of greatest importance to school district personnel is the knowledge of local needs and concerns that ESCs bring with them. Because they know the local districts so well, service centers can link districts together, serving as networking agents or even as brokers for services.

Participants at all six focus groups indicated that they use service providers from higher education, non-profit centers, and the private sector. These service vendors generally provide high quality services, but they are usually more expensive and less accountable. Many school districts do not believe they can get more efficient services or lower prices in a fully competitive market. School personnel want to look to a wide variety of organizations and vendors for services, but they do not want to replace ESCs. They are also less than enthusiastic about ESCs competing for "market share" among themselves. School districts want ESCs always to make service to local clients a priority over marketing of their own services.

6. IMPROVING REGIONAL EDUCATION SERVICE CENTERS

Focus group participants want services that are appropriate for their districts. These services need to be innovative, of high quality, and accessible to different types of districts. School district personnel believe that ESCs need more resources to provide ongoing and improved services. The services currently provided are described as cost-efficient for current needs but insufficient for future needs and threatened by difficulties in retaining competent personnel. Participants think that solutions to staffing problems should address turnover, workload, and interaction between ESC staff and the school districts. Participants view ESCs as collegial institutions: they should cooperate, not compete, with each other for programs and resources. Because small districts are highly dependent upon the ESCs, all participants recognize the importance of meeting small district needs. In order to serve all districts in a diverse state, participants favor ESCs that are responsive, flexible, and not constrained by mandates for uniformity.

SUMMARY

ESC clients want and use a wide and expanding range of accessible, high quality cost competitive services that help them achieve their academic and business goals. ESCs need to accommodate changing client needs but cannot let the pressure to expand services lower quality. ESCs serve clients better when performance expectations are clear, but they jeopardize the quality of services when they are expected to do too much. Clients value the local knowledge and presence of the ESCs but want services to be more accessible to classroom teachers. They encourage ESCs to hire, develop, and retain quality staff who remain current with classroom realities. Clients value expertise housed outside ESCs and in some areas, particularly technology, recognize that ESCs are challenged by both competition for expert staff as well as the rapid pace of innovation.

APPENDIX

Service Centers 2000
Survey for Texas School Districts

1. Check the statement that best describes your district's pattern of use of the ESC in the past two years:

___ This district significantly increased its use of ESC programs and services.
___ This district increased somewhat its use of ESC programs and services.
___ This district maintained its level of use of ESC programs and services.
___ This district reduced somewhat its use of ESC services.
___ This district significantly reduced its use of ESC programs and services.

2. Check the statement that best describes your district's current level of use of the ESC.

___ This district constantly uses ESC programs and services.
___ This district quite regularly uses ESC programs and services.
___ This district occasionally uses the ESC.
___ This district infrequently uses the ESC.
___ This district uses the ESC only when it is required to do so.

3. Check the statement that best describes your district's dependency on the ESC for training, support, and information.

___ This district absolutely needs the ESC, and it could not get along without it.
___ This district often depends on the ESC.
___ This district is somewhat dependent on ESC services.
___ This district does not depend on the ESC, but it uses ESC programs and services from time to time.
___ This district does not need the ESC and uses it only when required to do so.

The next question block is set up like a table. Rate your district's level of use and the value to your district of certain ESC services.

For the "level of use" column, use this rating scale:

5 Use frequently
4 Use Regularly
3 Occasional use
2 Seldom use
1 Do not use

For the "value of core services," use this rating scale:

5 Very high value
4 Better than average value
3 Average value
2 Lower than average value
1 Very low value

	Level of Use	Value
4. Training and assistance in reading and writing instruction		
5. Training and assistance in mathematics instruction		
6. Training and assistance in science and social studies instruction		
7. Training and assistance in special education		
8. Training and assistance in bilingual education		
9. Training and assistance in compensatory education		
10. Training and assistance in gifted and talented education		
11. Assistance for low-performing campuses		
12. Training and assistance in TAAS strategies		
13. Site-based decision-making training		
14. Instructional data processing		
15. Administrative data processing		
16. Financial accounting services		
17. Textbook displays		
18. Instructional media services		
19. Instructional cooperative(s)		
20. Purchasing cooperatives		
21. Other (describe)		

22. On a scale of 7 to 1, where 7 is the highest rating and 1 is the lowest rating, rate the value of the following specific programs and services as provided to your district by your ESC. Circle NA if you are not sure or if the item is not applicable.

a. Alternative certification programs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
b. Educator certification programs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
c. Educator job bank	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
d. Training and services for principals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
e. Training and programs services for parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA

f. Bus driver training	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
g. Teleconferences and distance learning	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
h. Coordination and cooperation with other entities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA

23. Using a scale of 7 to 1, where 7 is "most important" and 1 is "not important," rate the importance to your district of the ESC's role in providing the following:

a. Training and assistance for instructional personnel	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
b. Support for campus and district planning	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
c. Information about state laws and rules	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
d. A means and a place for meetings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
e. Distance learning activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
f. Support for cooperative services and programs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
g. Support and programs for instructional technology	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
h. Support and programs for administrative technology	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
i. Multi-regional programs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
j. A link with the Texas Education Agency	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA

24. What programs and services should be offered by the ESC that are not currently offered?

25. What programs and services should be discontinued because they are not appropriate or they are ineffective?

26. What are the ways that your district provides input and feedback to the ESC? Check all that apply.

___ The ESC has a regional advisory committee of superintendents.
___ There is a system of advisory groups for several of the ESC program areas.
___ The ESC director visits each district and asks for input.
___ The field service director visits each district and asks for input.
___ The ESC sends out surveys to get input.
___ Our district makes input known through TEA.
___ Our district gets input only when we complain.
___ Other (describe) _____

27. What are the ways that ESCs increase the efficiency of the system of public education in Texas? Check all that apply.

___ ESCs provide training and services at below-market prices.
___ The ESCs provide programs and services that have high capital costs that many districts could not afford to initiate by themselves.
___ ESCs offer opportunities for cooperative arrangements that save money.
___ Programs offered through the ESCs reduce the cost of training and certifying new teachers.
___ ESC distance learning programs reduce instructional costs for some classes.
___ Other (describe) _____

28. Use a rating scale of 1 through 7 for the next five questions, where 1 represents the lowest rating and 7 represents the highest rating.

a. Rate the quality of the organization of the ESC in your region.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
b. Rate the responsiveness of the ESC in your region to your district's needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
c. Rate the degree to which the ESC in your region is up to date and current on matters related to the operation of public schools and the instruction of students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
d. Rate the quality of ESC staff in your region.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
e. Rate the quality of the overall ESC operation in your region.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA

29. In your opinion, what is the best funding arrangement for Texas ESCs? (Please check.)

___ ESCs should be funded through a foundation program, much like school districts.
___ ESCs should be funded by the state on the basis of the number of students in the region.
___ Except for federal funds, ESCs should be totally funded with local revenues from fees or assessments.
___ The current system of financing should be maintained.
___ Other (explain)_____

30. What can ESCs do to better meet the needs of Texas school districts?

31. What is your ESC region number?____

32. What is your district's approximate fall 1995 enrollment?____

33. Check the words that best describe your district's environment.

__rural
__town
__medium-sized city
__suburban
__major city or urban
__other

Thank you for completing this survey.

CONNECTICUT RESC COST EFFECTIVENESS

by
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BACKGROUND

A common assumption about Educational Service Agencies (ESAs) is that they are beneficial in large measure because of the ways they support equitable, effective (high quality) educational programs and services delivered in the most efficient (cost-effective) manner (Stephens & Turner, 1991). However ESAs, like many other regional organizations and systems, function within a broader social, political and governmental context where a predisposition toward local control and the tendency for competition to override cooperation can become confounding factors within the equity-efficiency-effectiveness paradigm.

The purpose of this study was to explore cost-effectiveness in the context of Connecticut's six regional educational service centers (RESCs) using Stephens and Harmon's model (1995). The data-gathering and analysis strategies represented an attempt to address as many of Stephens and Harmon's 11 recommended minimal design features as possible. A three step process included an analysis of revenue and expenditure structures across all six RESCs (Stephens & Harmon 1, 2); the review/analysis of one selected service across three RECSs (Stephens & Harmon 3, 4); and, finally, a more detailed analysis of costs associated with one school district's purchase of a particular service through its RESC, compared with other possible providers (Stephens & Harmon 4, 5, 6, 8, 10).

FINDINGS

The annual reports submitted to the State Department of Education and each member board of education by Connecticut's six RESCs for 1994-95 provided the source data about revenue and expenditure structures (Stephens & Harmon, 1) and the scope and costs of programs and services provided on a collaborative basis (Stephens & Harmon, 2). While most contained many of the same elements, there was variation. For example, only four of the six agencies provided detail about projected revenue and expenses. One of the six did not provide any narrative descriptions about programs or services. There was little consistency in the presentation of data by the agencies. While the annual reports did not appear to address the notion of cost-effectiveness *per se*, they did provide "big picture" information about the overall budget size and revenue source by category.

All six RESCs provided similar core programs on an interdistrict or regional basis (e.g. special, early childhood and adult education; professional development; and some types of administrative support services, etc.).

The lack of consistency across the six annual reports prompted questions about their ultimate utility to the statutorily-prescribed intended audience, the State Board of Education. According to a former Deputy Commissioner of Education for Program and Support Services, annual reports from RESCs that were "operating ok," were given only "perfunctory review."

Given the apparent lack of interest on the part of legislators or the State Board of Education, there would appear to be little impetus for rethinking the format and/or content of the annual reports. However, given other states' experiences, Connecticut's RESC leadership might consider using the annual reports as ways of putting forward a more unified and coherent message both to their constituents and to state policy makers.

TRANSPORTATION SERVICES: RESC PERSPECTIVE

Out-of-district special education transportation was identified for more focused application of the Stephens and Harmon cost-efficiency model for the following reasons: (a) it was a service offered by most RESCs (b) it is relatively easy to identify non-RESC providers (c) there is a consistency in operating costs across providers (d) there is a fair presumption that it was purchased on the basis of requests for a quotation or bid, making it, at least at face value, less susceptible to other factors.

The annual reports indicated that transportation represented approximately five to six percent of each RESC's total budget. Three RESCs were selected for closer scrutiny. They served contiguous regions and represented a range from large to small, both in terms of student population and overall size of operation.

All three RESCs were asked to provide additional detail, by customer and volume of business, about the use of transportation services for 1994-95. Each used a different approach to calculating costs and developing quotations. RESC #1 charged either on the basis of mileage or time. Prices included all related fixed and variable costs including driver, vehicle, gas, etc. RESC #2 indicated that a ten year experience base permitted accurately quoting a price per run within distance-based concentric circles, adding a percentage to the base for distances outside the circle. Quotations were based on an assumption that vehicles would be full, either by one district or through ride-sharing among districts. Finally, the cost per vehicle was divided by the number of students to obtain a cost per trip per student, with a surcharge for wheelchair vehicles. RESC #3 developed price quotations on a case by case basis using (a) base vehicle cost per day (b) cost per gallon x miles traveled (c) per mile maintenance fee, and (d) driver's time (salary, fringe x time).

RESC #1 identified a local livery service, a human services agencies' transportation collaborative, and the school bus company as its major competition. RESC #3 also identified the major school bus contractors as well as taxi companies. While many of the major bus companies included out-of-district special education transportation rates as part of their overall bid quotation, there was usually no requirement that a district purchase those services from them. In fact, it appeared that, with some exceptions, there was an assumption that out-of-district special education transportation services did not need to be formally bid. This set the stage for districts to select a vendor on the basis of both financial and non financial considerations. Staff from two of the three RESCs studied described situations where they believed contracts were awarded on the basis of personal friendships and/or political considerations.

RESCs appeared to pride themselves on the fact that their vehicles complied with the highest Department of Transportation (DOT) standards, and that drivers were selected and trained to serve special populations. Most if not all drivers held a commercial license with the "S" designation indicating they met the requirements for transporting school children.

TRANSPORTATION: DISTRICT PERSPECTIVE

One medium-sized urban district was selected for further study based on the fact that in 1994-95 its out-of-district special education transportation services represented nearly 60% of RESC #1's overall transportation business for that year. The transportation coordinator and the finance director indicated that 1994-95 probably represented peak usage since shortly thereafter the situation became much more competitive. Previously, there had been few other vendors willing and interested in providing this service. Even the company which held the local school bus contract had not been interested, citing the challenging and difficult nature of the student population. Beginning in 1995, the district's bus company "...became very aggressive seeking any work they (could) get...." At the same time, an area human services transportation collaborative also began soliciting district business.

While the district did not believe it was required to use a formal bidding process for out-of-town student transportation, it adopted the practice of soliciting quotations. Staff provided qualified vendors with destinations and number of students who needed to be transported, requesting a "per student per day" quotation. It was evident from this set of quotations that both the bus company and the human services collaborative quoted on the basis of larger vehicles than the RESC, and that they had promoted ride sharing solutions. Thus, while the RESC's per vehicle per day charge was less than their two competitors, the overall quotation was higher due to the smaller vehicle size.

With three competing vendors, district officials began making its selection on the basis of lowest cost for comparable quality. They were also able to reassess their options in terms of possible cost-quality trade offs. The finance director indicated that while the RESC product was wonderful, their costs are astronomical, "...like buying a Cadillac when a Chevy will get you there." One "luxury" feature identified by the district was the relatively small (5 passenger) capacity of most RESC vehicles. With the 12 passenger van used by the other two providers, the per student/per vehicle/per day rate is significantly lower, even with fewer than 12 passengers. Also, the larger capacity permitted adding more students over the course of the year without adding vehicles.

District personnel identified several other factors that impacted selection. First, given comparable quotes, the district tended to stay with the same provider, "...if they're providing a good product, ... why go to someone new?" Especially the first year, they tried to avoid "putting all their eggs in one basket," given concerns about the ability of a new vendor to match standards and equipment. The district was also inclined, wherever possible, to link transportation services with educational programs . Thus, students going to a RESC program were more likely to be transported by those agencies' vehicles.

TRANSPORTATION: NON-RESC VENDOR PERSPECTIVE

The Human Service Transportation Collaborative (HSTC) was a private non-profit organization identified by both the district and the RESC as a RESC competitor. In an effort to increase the size of his operation, the collaborative's director began to market services to several school districts, including those where he had prior personal and professional relationships with transportation coordinators. Over several years, school contracts grew over to represent about 10% of the agency's total budget.

Rates were quoted on a per hour per vehicle basis, depending on type of vehicle, with a surcharge for aides. While all drivers held commercial licenses, they did not hold the "S" (school bus driver) designation because, according to the director, "this was not required for out-of-district transportation."

Responding to a recent district request for quotations, HSTC was able to suggest ride sharing possibilities which reduced the number of vehicles required, thus lowering the cost. While there was some question whether the newly configured routes would permit staying under the one hour travel limit, the director seemed confident that this effort on his part to save the customer money would contribute to his success in getting the contract.

CONCLUSION

While much of the data required to apply Stephens and Harmon's (1996) ESA cost-efficiency model to Connecticut RESCs was collected over the course of this study, it was not ultimately possible to determine a dollar benefit or savings to clients for out-of-district special education transportation provided by a RESC as compared with other service providers. In spite of some difficulty securing complete and comparable financial data, there did not appear to be any significant differences among providers in terms of the key ingredients used to determine customer costs (e.g. driver and aide salaries).

It would appear difficult if not impossible, based on the results of this exploratory study, to develop a statewide cost-efficiency model applicable across RESCs because of the significant differences in the ways the RESCs approach cost analysis and the difficulty in obtaining comparable information from district and/or third party vendors.

While the focus of this study was cost-effectiveness, it also became apparent that quality and equity were also factors, along with efficiency, in decisions customers made about the purchase of transportation services. The fact that customer decisions were made within a political context, for the most part outside a legally regulated bidding environment, further obscured and confounded attempts to analyze and compare transportation services solely on the basis of cost-efficiency.

There appeared to be significant differences in both type and quality of service provided by the different transportation providers, due in large measure to differing opinions about the need to comply with statutory school transportation regulations related to the licensing of drivers and the vehicles themselves. For example, the per student per day per run cost from a provider who used larger non-school bus type vehicles driven by drivers without the "S" designation on their commercial licenses would inevitably be less expensive than comparable service provided using smaller vehicles which met DOT school transportation standards and drivers holding the "S" commercial license. This would likely be true on even a per unit basis, even when the "costs of doing business" are in fact comparable. Without a common and consistent definition of minimal standards, RESCs (or other service providers) that exceed their customers' needs and/or expectations would have difficulty competing on the basis of efficiency.

A RESC transportation director recently revealed that there was currently a $25 million lawsuit being brought against a district by the parents of special needs student injured while being transported out-of-district to an educational program. The suit contended that the district used a non-complying provider. That district is now in the process of transferring its business to the RESC. Many other districts do not appear to understand or believe that these more stringent school transportation regulations also apply to out-of-district services.

Another quality issue with cost implications relates to ride sharing. As discussed previously, the non-RESC providers appeared to be pro-active in combining runs as a way of saving the district money. However,

combining runs to several sites was not always a good idea for several reasons, according to RESC experts. They suggested that ride sharing frequently led to inappropriate mixing of different age and different needs students on a single vehicle. Thus, a five year old autistic child might be on the same van with a teenager with severe social-emotional problems. Attempts to maximize the use of any one vehicle also increased the likelihood of exceeding the statutorily prescribed one hour travel limit.

The school district seemed to perceive the RESC as different from either the human services collaborative or the bus company in that it was quasi-governmental. District staff seemed somewhat surprised that RESC price quotations were based on the need to cover costs, suggesting perhaps they assumed the RESC had some other revenue source which could/should be used to offset district payments for service.

There was a strong suggestion that political and personal considerations played a part in the selection of vendors in a non-bid environment. Players had the opportunity to build on personal and professional friendships, creating a sense of 'preferred provider' status, as long as costs were kept reasonable, parents were satisfied, and all known and acknowledged regulations were followed.

This study also raised questions about the purpose and operation of the Connecticut RESC Alliance. Within the notion of shared services, such as transportation, there exist vastly different organizational profiles and "ways of doing business" which can appear disparate and confusing to school districts. If the RESCs determine that it is in their individual and collective interests to become more pro-active in terms of putting forward the equity-efficiency-effectiveness agenda, they would likely need to work through these apparent differences. Based on experiences in other states, they might want to anticipate a time when either the State Board of Education or others would consider using the annual reports in the public policy arena. The RESCs would then need to develop ways of showing both quantifiable and non-quantifiable benefits of their continued existence.

This limited study appears to illustrate the subtle yet complex ways efficiency, equity and effectiveness interrelate in terms of programs and services provided through a RESC. While RESC transportation services units were originally created to address an unmet need (equity), they now find themselves being evaluated by districts in terms of efficiency (cost), given competing and contradictory notions of what constitutes quality (effectiveness). There needs to be further study and analysis of other services to better understand how the RESC effectiveness-efficiency-equity paradigm applies to different situations over time.

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EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

by
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INTRODUCTION

Most developed countries in the world provide their school system with an educational support service. However, the ownership and position of these services, their tasks, the levels at which they are financed, their operating procedures and the methods by which they are evaluated differ a lot. This conclusion is drawn largely from the experience of educators and scholars; there is not much research to buttress any conclusions.

The Netherlands is one of a very few countries that "has a rich and elaborated educational support structure which is unique all over the world" (OECD, 1991). It is unique in several ways. It is nationally legislated, it covers the whole country, all schools have the free right to connect to these independent agencies and state and local authorities subsidize them. Also, all levels of government have been involved in evaluating them and the system has been reviewed in a comprehensive way.

Though other countries, states or provinces do organize educational support in other ways than The Netherlands, the assumption is that we can learn a lot from each other. However, that there is no comprehensive study on educational service agencies in any other country; therefore a comparative study is not available.

This article aims to present a model that can be used to describe educational services in different countries. It will be presented by describing Educational Service Agencies in The Netherlands. Perhaps this article will also facilitate more international communications between organizations like AAESA and WPRO and their members.

TOWARDS A DESCRIPTIVE MODEL OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICE

Rationale

"The educational consultant comes (and goes) in many different shapes and sizes" (Fullan, 1991, 215). This means that the work done by educational consultants, both as an individual and as an employee of an institution that provides educational service, is described in a many different ways. In order to clarify the concept and to communicate it clearly in the international arena, the first step is to look for a definition of educational service. We chose to use the one which describes the Dutch concept of "schoolbegeleiding" (Timmer, 1985), which may be translated as school counseling, -consultancy, -service. This definition reads as follows:

Educational Service is the planning, performing and evaluating of interventions in education, that are based on knowledge and skills and that are operated intentionally by a specific organized supporting system, which is connected to an active participating client system in order to facilitate improvements in the structure, culture and performance of the client system, aiming that the client system can better realize its goals.

The next step was the search for publications for information on theoretical concepts, location, work and results of educational service agencies. This was executed through Dutch overviews (Köllen, 1990) and research publications (reviewed by Slavenburg, 1995), The International Encyclopedia of Education, Second Edition (T. Husén and T.N. Postlethwaite, ed. (1994)) and the ERIC information system.

Theoretical notions had to be taken into account in order to create a model that would be consistent with the definition (Fullan, 1991; Glickman, 1992; Hopkins, 1994; Joyce, 1996; Pajak 1993). The model has been presented to a group of experts. The draft was used to describe four countries (Belgium, Israel, Luxembourg and The Netherlands) by document analysis, interviews, and reports that were sent to an expert correspondent in the respective countries. In another publication (Gorter, 1996) the theoretical background of the description model has been presented in an elaborated way. Four country reports have been included in that publication as well. The model itself has been evaluated and adapted after these four investigations. We will use this revised model to describe the case of The Netherlands in a next section. The search also pointed out in which countries educational service agencies are recognizable.

COUNTRIES WITH EDUCATIONAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

AAESA listed about 400 agencies in 35 states of the USA that provide educational services. Canada has also a variety of institutions at different levels. Europe shows a broad variety as well. The countries in which we see more or less dedicated public and private systems for educational service are Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. From other European countries data are rare or not available yet. The phenomena of educational service agencies is known in Australia as well. For Asia data are not available, except for Singapore. The situation in the Middle East is unknown, except for the State of Israel. No data are available yet from countries in South America and Africa. In other countries a variety of providers can be responsible for the educational service at the same time that they go about their other core business.

Table 1 presents both the revised model and indicates - very briefly - the results of our four country research.

EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES IN THE NETHERLANDS

1. *Context*

1.1. *Legitimation in society and education*

Education is a priority on the political agenda in The Netherlands. The cabinet recently finished a public debate on Knowledge for the New Millennium and added substantial structural money,to the state education budget, mainly to reduce the class size in primary education.

The consequences of an increasing diversity among the population, the improvement of the conditions for all for lifelong learning and participation, and information technology are most relevant for education.

TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES IN FOUR COUNTRIES
Belgium (B) Israel (IL), The Netherlands (NL) and Luxembourg (L);
+ means: described in the literature reviewed (Gorter, 1996)

		B	IL	NL	L
1.	**Context for providers**				
1.1.	Legitimation in society and education	+	+	+	1)
1.2.	School system; Ownership of providers	+	+	+	+
1.2.1	Quantative characteristics	+	+	+	
1.2.2	Different kinds, public and private	+	+	+	
2.	**Input at provider's level**				
2.1.	Influential actors on service program	+	+	+	
2.2.	Financial resources	+	+	+	+
2.3.	Policy, vision, and mission of providers	+	+	+	
2.4.	Staff development for ESA personnel	+	+	+	
2.5.	External expertise	+		+	
2.6.	Center of knowledge within ESA			+	
2.7.	Research and development			+	
2.8.	Total Quality Management	+		+	
3.	**Services and Results**				
3.1.	Intake; demand and supply			+	
3.2.	Services provided:				
a	Management of innovation	+	+	+	+
b	Organization development	+	+	+	
c	Student & parent counseling services	+	+	+	+
d	Developing educational materials	+	+	+	
e	Information services for clients	+		+	
f	Advising regional organizations			+	
4.	**Evaluation**			2)	
4.1.	Policy Review			+	
4.2.	Client Satisfaction			+	
4.3.	Inspectorate	+		+	

Remarks: 1) Luxembourg has no legislated system for educational service; non dedicated institutions are providing some educational service.

There is consensus that general education should concentrate at language teaching (reading comprehension), early childhood, diversity, (school) improvement for the disadvantaged, mainstreaming and inclusion of special education, standards and accountability.

1.2. *The school system; ownership of providers*

In 1918 the Dutch liberal government desired a public education system in which all the denominational parties of the country, Protestants, Catholics and Humanists, should be included and would feel comfortable. The religious groups refused, however, and the result was that The Netherlands has an educational system in which all schools of all denominations are financially supported equally for full cost by the National Government. One consequence of this system is that parents are free in their choice for any school. Another is that the school boards have a large freedom in their organization, personnel matters and the curriculum.

Operating in a complex environment, school boards - governing a relatively small number of small schools, especially in primary education - traditionally rely upon external agencies for support. Along with the broad movement of renewal of education in the post Second World War years and with education for the economic, social and culturally disadvantaged in the sixties, local governments and local school boards established local and regional educational service agencies, serving all schools, despite the denominational differences in education. Later on the national government took over the maintenance of this infrastructure by legislating the goals, tasks, governance structure, program, quality and financing of service agencies. The national government approved budgets and plans of the agencies. Local governments could continue their responsibility by subsidizing the support system as well but formally seen, they had little or no say in the programming. In fact, however, the schools determined the plans with the service centers through a demand and supply cycle. In the case of 61 local and regional service agencies, this situation will change dramatically from January 1998 on. Then the national government will fund the local community authorities instead of the service centers. The local community authorities in their turn must fund the agencies with this earmarked money during a four year transition period. Also all local authorities have to make the effort to keep their common budget at the same level as the national government does. Thus, the local communities will be the new owners of educational service agencies and have more influence on their programs. Though this infrastructure has to be maintained by the local authorities, the majority of the centers are independent private entities. Only five centers out of 61 are a part of a public authority.

1.3. *Quantative Characteristics*

The oldest service agencies are the three Pedagogical Centers; they were established as study centers for the main religious denominations. They developed themselves as innovation institutes with projects for long term educational development for all levels and inservice training for secondary school teachers. Other agencies have dedicated tasks to develop curricula, tests and execute research. Universities are among

(Table 2 shows the number of schools, students, agencies, their staff and some ratios)

TABLE 2: NUMBERS AND RATIOS OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICE IN THE NETHERLANDS

	Total	Average per EAC
Number of Educational Service Centres	61	
Number of primary schools (K-6)	7500	123
Number of special ed schools (K-12)	1000	16
Number of students	1,650,000	27,000
Total number of staff	2,600	42
Management staff	100	1.5
Professional staff	1,900	31
Support staff	600	10

Remark: Primary schools include two grades of kindergarten (4- and 5-years old pupils) and 6 grades of elementary education (6-12 years). Education is compulsory from 5 years. Statistics show that 98% of all 4 year olds enroll in primary education.

them. These centers do not literally match the definition of a service center given in section 2. For this reason we will only refer to them parenthetically.

This main group of service agencies includes all 61 local and regional educational service centers which have to be maintained by the local authorities. The number of agencies is slightly decreasing, caused by voluntary mergers, though the legislation requires that each center serve a minimum of 20,000 students. The largest agency serves over 60,000 students.

2. *Input at Providers Level*

2.1. *Influential Actors on the Service Program*

Three main policies determine the work of the ESAs in schools in The Netherlands: the national innovation policy, education policies of local authorities and policies of the school boards. This complex situation requires coordinating mechanisms like a national innovation process management group, negotiations between school boards and local authorities, and planning meetings and account management at the level of the school building.

2.2. *Financial resources*

By the end of 1997 all 61 educational service centers will be subsidized by the national government and by the local community authorities. In 1996 the national government allocated approximately 60 million US dollars for service centers. The local communities together contributed an additional 80 million US dollars. The budget per student for educational services in primary education was approximately 90 US Dollars. Based on this macro budget from which 80% is paid for salaries, and considering the number of staff, the average amount of billable hours per year for a full time staff member (between 1400 and 1600 hrs), it can be concluded that the average cost for one hour of consultancy is about 80 US dollars.

In addition to funding by the national and local governments, there are also third parties that buy services from the educational service centers or sponsor them. The total part of earnings from third parties is between 4 and 20 percent of the regular total budget of each of the educational service centers. (WPRO, 1995).

2.3. *Policy, Vision and Mission of the Service Agencies*

Counseling and advising schools, dissemination of information, development of educational materials, evaluation of programs and activities that promote an optimal school career for children (in primary education) are core activities, prescribed both by current legislation and the law that will go into effect next year. Most educational service centers have included these core tasks in their own strategic plans.

2.4. *Staff*

Legislation requires that education service agencies have to contribute to the maintenance and improvement of quality of education by serving schools in the fields of pedagogy, methodology, subject disciplines, psychology, organizational and educational change and information and communication technology. To carry out these tasks minimum competences are required. All consultants must have been graduated from university or must have a higher vocational education degree with sufficient experience and knowledge.

The consultant profession is changing from a generalist towards a specialized one because of a changing client attitude and by the very broad spectrum of topics. At the same time it is recognized that executing the consultant work must be separated from the planning and evaluation of that work; evaluation is performed at the management level.

In-service training for all the staff working in the educational service centers has been included in the state funded support infrastructure. More and more universities and third parties are taking over that role. Most recently the initiative has been taken to establish a professional organization for all consultants working in the field. In this organization the unions, other professional organizations and the Association of Educational Service Centers (WPRO) will cooperate to ensure opportunities for further professional development. A professional competencies profile, developed by WPRO, lies at the basis of this initiative.

2.5. *External Expertise*

Educational Service Centers do not hire significant numbers of external professionals to serve their clients. There is a frequently exchange of staff expertise between the agencies.

2.6. *Center of Knowledge*

Most of the service agencies maintain their own professional filing system. Some networks of professionals are maintaining an interactive system through e-mail and electronic platforms. WPRO, as an association of all the centers, also maintains data that are available to the individual agencies.

2.7. *Research and Development*

Most agencies are too small to perform research and development on their own. Cooperation between the agencies, between agencies and teacher training colleges and with universities can be seen frequently. WPRO also executes some projects that are for the benefit of all its members.

2.8. *Total Quality Management*

Until 1998 Her Majesty's Inspectorate has the specific task of monitoring the quality of the work of the Educational Service Centers. HMI reviewed the agencies recently on a variety of standards and indicators and reported a quite heterogeneous picture. After 1998 this is the task of the Agencies themselves. On a voluntary basis they agreed with WPRO on a system of external audits and on the development of a uniform system to collect data on satisfaction of schools, results of the service given, and on data that are related to their financial economic management.

3. *Services and Results*

The primary process of providing educational services to schools includes the intake, the service itself, and the evaluation. The latter aspect will be described in paragraph 5.

3.1. *The Intake Stage/Demand and Supply*

Local authorities that are funding the educational service agency offer in this way free access of all the schools in their community to educational services. No contracts are needed between school boards and ESAs. The rules in the Civil Code are applicable between local authority, provider and school boards. Research has demonstrated that the process of matching the needs of schools with the services provided by the centers in itself is of sufficient quality (Van Gennip, 1990), but that elements of the process could be improved (Koster, 1994). Koster referred to the need of improvement in defining actions, time management, the involvement of schools themselves and the definition of required outcomes and output.

3.2. *The Services Provided*

This section will describe the fields in which educational service agencies are operating and the level of satisfaction of the users. Particular focus will be placed on the results of teacher use and on student achievement.

a. *Services in the Field of Innovation and School Improvement*

In the initiation process of an innovation the influence of the work of the centers on the adoption of the educational ideas has been crucial for the development of primary education as a whole. Most research has been concentrated on the implementation stage of the innovation process. From 61 reports the general consensus is that only a combination of training sessions related to clinical supervision and to teacher counseling seems to be the most productive intervention (Slavenburg, 1995, 38, 54). Incorporation of an innovation seems to be the most neglected part of external support. There are no research data available at this point.

b. *Services in the Field of the Development of the School Organization*

At the level of the school system the Dutch agencies have supported the nation wide merge of Kindergarten and Elementary school in 1985 into the Primary School. Support has also been given to improve cooperation between regular and special education schools. Agencies also play an important role in the merger of schools.

The functioning of the school team is another issue the agencies are familiar with. The development of "school work plans" is seen as a positive contribution to the team building in schools (Verhoeff, 1992.) There is no substantial research reported on the results of all these activities.

c. *Student and Parent Counseling Services*

Supporting teachers in solving problems they have with children with learning and emotional disabilities is a priority function. Significant research has been reported and it is suggested that, by these interventions, a decrease of referral to special education schools of 2.1% of all pupils of primary education might be the achieved. (Slavenburg, 1995, p. 91). Less attention is paid to the gifted and talented. Some specific research is carried out; results have not been reported.

Ten out of 61 agencies are counseling in the field of school choice and vocational choice. No reports are available. Dutch agencies are not working in the paramedical or psychiatric field.

d. *Development and Dissemination of Educational Materials*

Only the larger Educational Service Centers have the opportunity to develop textbooks and to disseminate these through educational publishers. Most educational service centers develop materials as instruments for supporting their interventions. Materials that were used as implementation plans were highly appreciated. Some of them were used very frequently in schools. (Van Gennip, 1990)

e. *Information Services*

Almost all Educational Service Center have an Educational Information Center. The aim of this core activity is to inform teachers about new releases of materials of educational publishers (hard copies as well as videos and interactive software) and to help them in the decision making process of selecting materials, and tying this choice to the innovation capacity of the school itself. The Information Centers give also access to a national database which is coordinated by WPRO. Almost 90% of all primary schools make visits to the centers and take information with them. Between 75% and 85% of the schools use the information for discussion and other conceptual activities in school. (Slavenburg, 1995, p. 106)

f. *Advising Regional Organizations*

Most educational service centers give advice not only to schools but also to other organizations. These include networks of school boards, local community authorities and cooperatives of local authorities. Organizations of parents and departments of teacher unions are target groups too. Research reports generally support the conclusion that educational service agencies provide advice to these organizations. (Slavenburg, 1995, p. 109)

4. *Evaluation*

The final section of the descriptive model deals with the evaluation of the infrastructure as a whole, taking into account the data presented in the previous sections of this model. The satisfaction of the clients and the success of the agencies' work as perceived by the public, stakeholders and key persons in society is of great importance too.

Overall the agencies are fully accepted in The Netherlands. Current evaluations show that clients are very satisfied with the services provided by the Dutch educational service centers. This is illustrated by the average score from relevant research and on reports of the Dutch Inspectorate of Education. (Inspectie van het Onderwijs 1992, 1993, 1995)

The next four years will make clear if the local communities are able to maintain this unique infrastructure and if the Dutch ESAs will be able to show that their support makes a difference at the level of student achievement in their regions. This means that all of the elements of the descriptive model that we have introduced in this article will be used to monitor the developments closely.

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DEDICATED STAFF AND GRANT FUNDS ENRICH PROGRAMS FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

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Almost all of the youth enrolled at the Ulster BOCES Alternative School at Tillson in New York State were once potential dropouts in their home schools. The school is currently thriving with 110 students attending the Alternative School at Tillson and 13 more are enrolled in the Parenting Teen Program located nearby at the Ulster BOCES Port Ewen Educational Center. In 1984, the first Alternative School students attended class in a dilapidated former supermarket. Then, in 1989, BOCES went out for a county-wide referendum, the success of which permitted the construction of a new school which housed both the Alternative School and the Alternative Learning Program (part of the Special Education Division.) By 1996, the Alternative School had outgrown its quarters and moved to a leased elementary school which had been renovated for its new use. At first, the school was not a welcome addition to the community of Tillson. However, this resistance was pacified after a series of community informational sessions at which administration, staff and students participated. The community resistance was further conquered since students did not create problems for local residents during the 1996-97 school year. Locating this school in an attractive, newly renovated building and the current separation of the Alternative School from the other BOCES programs has provided administration, staff and students with a more clearly defined sense of identity through which to address their academic and social challenges.

At this time, the students at the Alternative School, many of whom were thrown out of their local schools or were mandated to this program by the court, have achieved an 80% attendance rate. They are working hard to improve their behavior, have a more positive attitude about school and are unquestionably experiencing more academic success than ever before. The percentage of Alternative School students earning a regular high school diploma rose from 47% in 1992 to 83% in 1996. As the number of students earning a regular high school diploma rose, the number of students earning a G.E.D. dropped. In 1992, 53% of the students received a G.E.D., whereas in 1996 this figure fell to 17%. Interestingly, as the number of students earning a regular high school diploma rose, so did the number of students who continued their education after high school. In 1992, only seven percent of students went on to higher education. By contrast, in 1996, 54% were enrolled in colleges and post-secondary training programs. School administrators at BOCES believe the reason for the students' achievements is that school is more interesting because of (1) innovative programs that were made possible through grant funding, and (2) supportive teachers and staff who have created a learning environment tailored to the individual needs of the students. "It all ties in," said Virginia Murchison, Director of Special and Alternative Education at Ulster BOCES. "The students who are in school more meet higher expectations and develop increased self-esteem."

Also observing that greater success in school is related to improved attendance, Alternative School principal Steve Chaikin credits a number of factors for the rising numbers. Among the most identifiable are curriculum enrichment programs such as: the ArtsTeach program, Peer Mediation Training, activities at the Center for Symbolic Studies and at Frost Valley Center for Environmental and Wilderness Explorations, abuse awareness and first aid training, Multicultural Days and after-school tutoring. These programs were made

possible through funding from a New York State Youth-At-Risk grant which provided $60,000 for the 1996-97 school year. In addition, the Ulster County Department of Social Services provided funding in the amount of $48,000 for the 1996-97 school year to support an Interagency Collaboration Program designed to provide case management and wraparound services for target students.

Youth-At-Risk funding initially supported the ArtsTeach program, which was introduced at the Alternative School four years ago. The program first brought artists into school to work intensively with students on projects which were loosely curriculum-related. Currently, $27,857 is allotted to the ArtsTeach program. This funding enables this school to contract with the Mill Street Loft, a multi-arts educational center in Poughkeepsie, New York which helps bring artists into community/school settings to work with students. This year the link between artist and teacher has been strengthened. Artists meet with teachers and collaboratively plan lessons that directly relate to the curriculum. Recent ArtsTeach projects have included lantern making related to a unit on Japan, and political poster designing linked to a social studies project about the Holocaust. As part of another highly successful teacher/artist collaboration, students constructed small white boxes into which they placed miniature toys they had sculpted themselves. The boxes were then labeled with vocabulary words referring to emotions such as anger, regret and guilt that students recalled feeling when they put their childhood toys away forever. The vocabulary list emerging from this project was subsequently used as part of an English class discussion about the John Knowles coming-of-age novel, A Separate Peace.

Another Youth-At-Risk funded program that has made important contributions in establishing the school as a place at-risk students wish to be is Peer Mediation Training. In 1996-97, 11 students, or 10% of the school population, participated in the training provided by Ulster/Sullivan BOCES Mediation, Inc., a program which serves both counties. This program is supported by $1,200 from the Youth-At-Risk grant. Since the mission of the Alternative School at Tillson is not only to educate the students academically but to help them to deal with daily conflicts which repeatedly impede accomplishment, peer mediation training instills skills for students to constructively deal with daily conflicts. The peer mediation training is done under the supervision of trained experts who work with students over the course of the entire year. Some students voluntarily sign up for a second year. Chaikin said that the process of student/teacher mediation is impressive and that students who have participated in the training spend less time out of class resolving conflicts. Why is this approach successful? Chaikin explained that having a student lectured to by an adult teacher has its limitations. "We are successful with peer mediation because we are preparing our students to deal with themselves as well as with other people."

Although largely recreational, the Center for Symbolic Studies at the Stone Mountain Farm in New Paltz, New York has proven its worth as yet another creative incentive program sponsored by $9,057 of funds from the Youth-At-Risk grant. Throughout the year, but primarily functioning as an approach to combat spring fever, students are rewarded for good citizenship, academic standing and attendance with time scheduled to participate in activities at the local farm. At this site, students take part in supervised activities such as rock climbing, horseback riding, mountain biking and martial arts. The Youth-At-Risk grant also provides an additional $3,500 to support supervised overnight expeditions for 20 students to the Frost Valley Center for Environmental and Wilderness Explorations. Chaikin said that students enjoy these opportunities enormously and they work hard to earn the reward of participating in the outdoor activities. Along the way they learn skills and responsibilities linked to each activity and build self-esteem as they master a variety of skills.

Youth-At-Risk funds were also made available to help meet the needs of a specific group of students with specialized needs. The Youth-At-Risk grant directed $1,000 to the United Way for abuse awareness training and $1,500 of the funding to provide Red Cross First Aid training to the 13 students enrolled in the Parenting Teen Program. Parenting Teen teacher Sharyn Mansour said that when students who have completed the program were asked about its value, they responded that while they all hoped they would not have to use their new skills, they felt more secure having had this first response training.

Youth-At-Risk funding has also been used for creative programs that make the school a more interesting place to be. Monthly Multicultural Days are now planned to highlight particular cultures. These occasions feature guest speakers and guest artists. "The ultimate goal of these specially designated events is to make students more open minded and tolerant of people who are different from themselves," said Chaikin. Another program, after-school tutoring, is also part of the school support system made possible by the Youth-At-Risk funding. Currently, two to three afternoons a week, teaching assistants tutor students who need to complete work. According to Chaikin, students are aware that enrollment in the Alternative School is a privilege which their home school districts determine and pay for, so extended incompletes are not acceptable. Students are increasingly asking to make arrangements to stay after school to make up missed work in order to remain in good academic standing in their classes. "Constituent districts are helping to paint a brighter future for those students who aren't making it in the traditional school setting. Instead of giving up on them and allowing them to fail or drop out, districts are providing funds to give students a second chance at succeeding," Chaikin said gratefully.

In addition to the funds secured through the Youth-At-Risk grant, the Alternative School at Tillson receives funding from other sources as well. Since August 1994, the Ulster County Department of Social Services has provided funding to support a program for students who have been identified by the Department's Division of Coordinated Children's Services as being at risk of placement in a residential facility. Called the Interagency Collaboration Program, or ICP, the program involves students in after school activities in addition to their case management component. These students can stay after school for tutoring and/or various recreational activities. Students can explore their interests in numerous subjects such as music, drama, arts, crafts, photography, computers or basketball. They can also participate in workshops on employability skills or join the movie club. "The ICP program encourages students to get involved with the activities they enjoy. This keeps the kids coming back for more the next day," said Chaikin. He added, "Parents who work later than 5:00 P.M. no longer have to worry about where their kids are and what they are doing." The funding also enables students and their parents to come into the school for dinners with other program participants and their families.

Innovative programs, of course, do not eliminate poor attendance and other problematic student behavior. The way staff systematically responds to student' behaviors also contributes to students' academic success. A lot has changed since Chaikin took on the job of principal two years ago. The use of out-of-school suspension has dropped dramatically. Often perceived by students as a way of staying home and sleeping late, suspension often served to create a more negative attitude about school and caused students who were already having trouble completing work to miss even more class time. During the 1995-96 school year, 68 students were suspended. By contrast, during the 1996-97 school year, only 42 have been suspended, representing a 38% decrease. Today, relatively short in-school detentions are used for inappropriate behavior. Often the student is assigned to community service projects as a method of instilling respect for property and other people at the school. Cleaning school walls might be assigned to a student who vandalized school property, or scrubbing a school bus may be the punishment for a student who threw a clay project on

Everything from curriculum development and mediation policy to grant writing is seen as an evolving process requiring the interaction between administration, staff and students. Staff attend regular site team meetings where broad concepts are reviewed. Immediate concerns are discussed at weekly faculty meetings. The grants, which are so critical to many Alternative School at Tillson programs, have been written by teams of staff and administrators under the oversight of Dr. Donna Moss, Ulster BOCES Coordinator of Research and Development. Students have also participated in the formulation of some grant proposals. For the Interagency Collaboration Program, for example, they provided personal testimony about how the proposed program would benefit young people. Beyond grant writing, participation at agency-wide staff development activities is encouraged and staff members feel they have the support of the administration to develop their own ideas or apply successful models presented at professional conferences. Many of the ideas put into practice have not required external funding.

An excellent example was the effort of a social studies teacher, Michael Brown, to improve curriculum assessment. Inspired by the work that colleagues in another county were doing on portfolio projects, Brown secured a variance in 1996 from the New York State Education Department regarding the Regents Competency Test in 10th grade Global Studies. According to this ruling students work throughout the term on a portfolio project which then counts for the essay portion of the Regents Exam. Virginia Murchision, Director of Special and Alternative Education, said, "not only did more students pass the RCT, but they also did better on the multiple choice questions. I think they just learned the material more thoroughly in the process of putting their portfolios together."

Chaikin said that all teaching at the school is undertaken with the understanding that students have different learning styles. As a long time educator in the field of special education, Chaikin fully appreciates the program's commitment to adequate staffing. Within the past few years the staff at the Alternative School at Tillson has grown to include ten teachers, one guidance counselor, three social workers, one nurse, one case aide and two crisis intervention specialists. This kind of staffing allows for much needed day-to-day processing of problems among students, between students and teachers, or between students and their families. A hope for the future is to have a full-time substance abuse counselor. "We are all working hard to change the cycle of failure and conflict. This is a continuing process," Chaikin said. "We certainly haven't found the answer for everyone, but our attendance rate shows that we are offering something that keeps our students in school and gives them the opportunity to succeed." Chaikin said further that the Alternative School administrators believe the increasing attendance rate at the Alternative School at Tillson will provide a realistic base for determining how the school approaches the goal of complying with the New York State Regents' call for Higher Standards for Teaching and Learning.

Chaikin said that an understanding of the social and psychological background of the students at the Alternative School defines a school philosophy that colors all of its programs. Students who come to the Alternative School have experienced repeated failure both academically and socially. For years, many have been involved with substance abuse, problems at home and even homelessness. Many have a history of running from their problems and some live in unsupervised settings. The Alternative School's philosophy is characterized by acceptance and respect for everyone in the school community. When students have a conflict they are given the opportunity to claim ownership of their behavior and the staff then works with them to understand ways the problem could have been handled differently. Because these students need to feel they have some sort of control, the staff consciously involves students in decision-making situations that allow them to feel that school is not just about being forced into prescribed behavior. "Students know that their voice will be heard. They are not just a number," said Chaikin.

The goal of the Alternative School at Tillson is to get at-risk students to become interested in school so they will attend. "We are attempting to provide students with what they need to believe in the importance of an education and succeed in school," said Virginia Murchison. With the help of grant funds to support interesting programs for students and the dedication and understanding of a skilled staff, it is no wonder Alternative School students are going to school more and accomplishing so much while they are there. The grant funding has provided an enormous shot in the arm by allowing the school to put creative programs into practice. Experience with innovative programming has in turn infused the staff and administration with the certainty that even if grant funding were to dry up, the key to success with at-risk youth lies in supporting innovative approaches to teaching and learning. The participation of those concerned must direct all decision-making. The reward for this approach is already evident and encouraging for the future. Students are making dramatic shifts as they go about being who they are. They are not so oppositional in their approach toward education, and they are understanding the reasons for processing and resolving their conflicts. This is great news for a program full of students who once thought school was not for them.

SELF-SUPPORTING, SELF-SUSTAINING STUDENT PROGRAMMING

by
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Mt. Vernon, Washington

We knew it could be done. It was just a matter of finding the right combination of student programs and marketing strategy. The goal? To provide high quality, direct programming to students and make it be self-supporting.

The State of Washington has nine Educational Service Districts (ESDs) spread out over a geographical area as diverse as any in the United States. Local school districts are found in the mountains, high-country desert, on the ocean seacoast and even on islands which are accessible only by boat or small plane. Northwest ESD 189, located in the northwest corner of the state, is an educational service agency working with thirty-five rural and urban school districts in a five county region. Districts as large Edmonds, Washington with 20,000 students and as small as Shaw Island's eight pupils (yes, eight!) constitute this service area. Overall, the student population of the Northwest ESD service region exceeds 150,000.

Washington, as with many states, has seen a long and steady decline in funding for Gifted and Talented (G/T), or Highly Capable Education. This was money that schools and parents were dependent on for specialized programming for specific high-end academic programming or enrichment-based resource rooms for bright and motivated students. These are the very same students whose parents, often frustrated with the lack of public school programming, may turn to alternative educational delivery systems such as home-schooling and early entrance or "running start" programs at the community college level. With this steady decline in state funding, local school districts are downsizing or even dropping their G/T programs, exacerbating the problem for parents, students and educators.

Enter the Educational Service District. Local districts turned to the ESD for guidance and leadership that would help them support their own local programming. How could highly specialized programs and projects for this small, but important, segment of the student population be maintained? In order to help, Northwest ESD 189 went to the Federal G/T identification guidelines to see who their new clients might be.

> (The gifted and talented are)... children and , whenever applicable, youth who are identified at the preschool, elementary, or secondary level as possessing demonstrated or potential abilities that give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, specific academic or leadership ability or in the performing or visual arts, and who by reason thereof require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school. (U.S. Congress, Educational Amendment of 1978 [P.L. 95-561, IX (A)]).

This was the target audience and gave direction as to what was needed: student-oriented programs that dealt with areas and topics that included:

- Leadership
- Creativity
- General intellectual skills, specific academics
- Performing and visual arts

Could the ESD create, plan, and deliver programs that would directly interface with these types of students? Could this programming also enhance or interact with local G/T programming? And just as important, who would pay for such programming and could it provide enough revenue to sustain and maintain itself? It was going to take a lot of planning, surveying of districts, creating marketing strategies and no small amount of hard work to establish viable programs. There was not an ESD in the state that had an office specifically devoted to student programs. A few ESDs had one or two student programming options or academic competitions, but not one had taken it on as a large scale effort.

In 1993 the Northwest ESD's Office of Student Programs was initiated. Its goals were to provide first class, high quality student programming that client districts, individual schools, and even stand-alone students could choose to participate in. In addition, a primary financial goal was for our office to become self sufficient/self maintaining with no federal, state or ESD core funding provided. If it was going to make it, it would have to do it on its own.

Using the federal guidelines as the starting point for the design of its 'end-product' programs and projects, the Office of Student Programs went forward with planning, marketing, and implementing its program concept. What evolved was an eclectic menu of high-end student programming options covering all the areas laid out by the federal G/T identification guidelines: leadership training and conferences for middle school and high school government leaders and club officers; state-wide Scholastic Chess Tournaments and classes in chess instruction for teachers and students; major field trips to multiple state sites for advanced study in physics, aerospace, Shakespeare, and oceanography. Other offerings included Young Authors conferences, summer computer camps, and live county-wide theatrical productions (which attracted paying audiences in the thousands); and various other student workshops and classes with titles that piqued the interest of talented and motivated students.

Four years later the ESD provides solid programming that is financially holding its own while adequately paying the instructors, coordinators, and support personnel necessary to present it. While the fiscal bottom line is healthy, the program results are even more encouraging. The ESD has provided first class, high-end, quality student programming that has positively impacted the local school districts and the communities that they serve. In the 1996-97 school year over 2,500 students will have participated directly in an ESD regional office program, with the ripple effect touching thousands more in the creation of local programs modeled on the ESD example. The community recognizes the service agency contribution through participation as audience for many student presentations.

Local school districts will use the programs provided by the ESD to enhance their own programs, frequently as capstones for their own G/T or advanced placement classes. For example, a high school theater or English department will send top students to the Ashland, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, where they will see state-of-the-art theater and work along side some of this country's finest Shakespearean actors. Home

schoolers and parents actively pursue placement on ESD mailing lists, wanting to get involved in the programs that meet the needs of their highly-capable students.

Whether it's to take a part on stage, to help provide a venue for their art work or to play in a nationally ranked chess tournament, the programming is designed to meet student needs and interests, needs and interests that the local district often cannot afford to respond to or does not have the administrative resources to put it together for a single district. The ESD programs all have charges attached to them and whether the school, the parent, or the individual student pays, it is an academic 'pay-to-play' situation. The revenue pays for the programming.

The ESD achieved its goals of providing financially self-sufficient programming and the local districts have received help for their students. This is a real win-win position for the agency, the local districts and, most importantly, the students.

Northwest ESD 189, Office of Student Programs, won the Washington State Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (WSASCD) State Award for Program Excellence for 1997.

SUPPORTING SCHOOLS THROUGH LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATIVE PRACTICES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

by
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School reform has become an increasingly common topic in educational journals and the popular press. The fourth issue of Volume 25 of School Psychology Review (Knoff & Curtis, 1996) was devoted almost entirely to issues and recommendations related to reform. The theme throughout the issue was that pressure for reform is increasing and that systematic, systemic, and comprehensive efforts will be necessary to fundamentally improve public education.

Heartland Area Education Agency (AEA) 11 is one of 15 legislatively mandated intermediate units in Iowa. AEAs provide support to school districts within their geographic boundaries in a variety of areas including staff development, media and graphic art services, and professional library services. AEAs provide districts with general and special education support personnel as well as leadership in educational systems reform.

The Iowa Department of Education, Iowa's AEAs, and local schools have pursued comprehensive special education reform since 1986 (Grimes & Tilly, 1996; Reschly & Grimes, 1991). Foundation principles guiding these efforts were developed collaboratively and include: (a) integration of special- and general-education services; (b) measuring student performance frequently and changing programs when students are not progressing; (c) early intervention; (d) staff development; (e) parent involvement, and (f) site-based management (Ikeda, Tilly, Stumme, Volmer, & Allison, 1996).

SPECIAL EDUCATION REFORM IN HEARTLAND AEA 11

As a result of these reform initiatives, Heartland AEA 11 has developed a non-traditional, collaborative model for serving children (see Figure 1). The ideas presented herein represent the talents and ideas of individuals and groups from throughout AEA 11, Iowa State University, and the State of Iowa Department of Education. The model presented is sensitive to both meeting children's needs and working within available resources. The model guides all educators through a systematic process for identifying and remediating problems, no matter what the nature of the problem may be. Moreover, the model provides a comprehensive framework for coordinating resource allocation across the many different programs and services available within local schools. Thus, the model assures that resources are used efficiently in that only the resources needed to resolve or improve the problem are allocated, and engagement of more intensive resources is only pursued in cases where lesser resources are not sufficient.

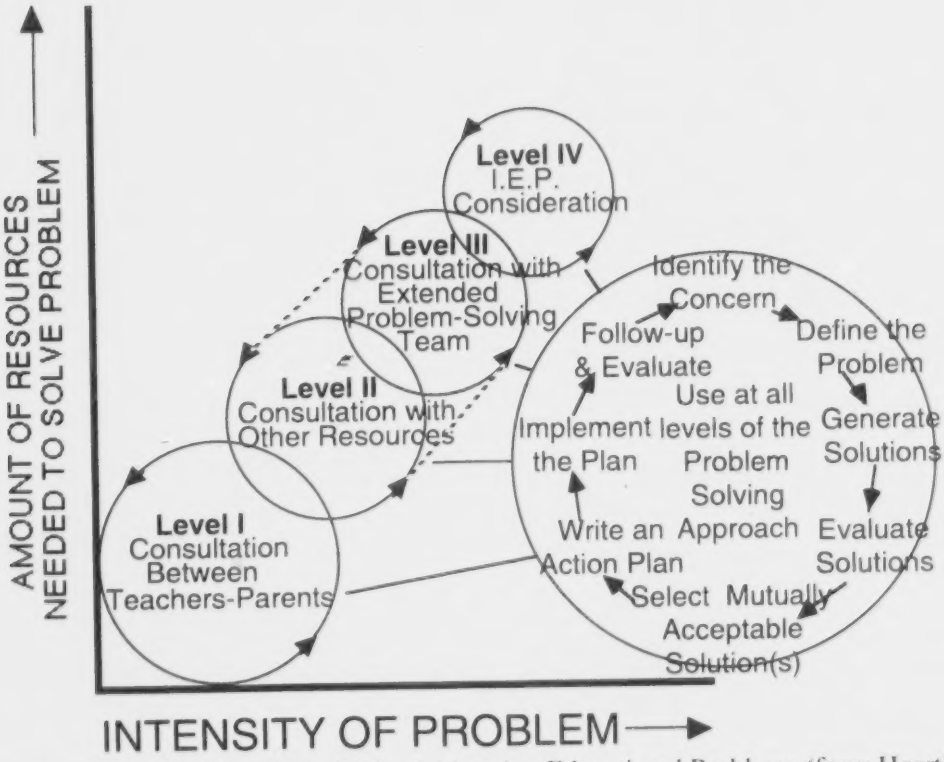

Figure 1. A Four Level Model for Addressing Educational Problems (from Heartland AEA 11, 1996).

In this framework, problems are addressed at four levels corresponding to increasing levels of formality and intensity of service delivery. Students move from one level to another as they demonstrate need either because of escalating problems or of increased need of resources.

The first level in the model involves parent-teacher collaboration. Addressing problems at this level is a relatively common occurrence and results in resolution for a large number of school-related problems.

At the second level, the parent and teacher from Level 1 collaborate with other teachers or resource providers who possess expertise for solving the problem. AEA 11 staff are sometimes involved at Level 2. Evaluations at Level 2 also help the LEA determine if accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are required. The activities at Levels 1 and 2 are site-based in that they are completely controlled by local schools in their design and implementation. Heartland AEA 11 has, however, provided extensive training to LEAs to support problem solving at Levels 1 and 2.

At the third level in Heartland's model, support staff from the Special Education Division become directly involved with problem solving efforts. Support staff help develop, implement, and monitor interventions carried out in general education classrooms. Support staff who are available to assist in problem solving include: adaptive physical education teachers, assistive technology team members, autism resource team members, Early Childhood consultants, Home Intervention teachers, educational trainers, hearing specialists, instructional consultants, Parent/Educator liaisons, physical therapists, occupational therapists, school psychologists, school social workers, speech and language pathologists, vision specialists, work experience coordinators, and Special Education nurse-consultants. At level 3, the role of AEA 11 Special Education

staff is to support interventions in general education that address the problem identified through levels 1 and 2 of the problem solving process. The support staff involved depends on the identified problem and staff expertise.

It is important to note that the role of AEA Special Education support staff at level 3 is not to assist in determining Special Education entitlement. Instead, the focus at this level of the system is the same as the focus at levels 1 and 2; namely, solving the problem in general education. Only when the problem requires intensive resources to manage and/or does not improve through the course of reasonable general education interventions is the question of entitlement for special education explored. At level 4, the problem solving process continues, but at an even more intensive level. The goal is still to identify the nature and type of resources that will be needed to address an educational problem. It is at level 4 that the administrative question of whether special education resources may be necessary to address the problem is examined. At this point, special educators from AEA 11 ensure that provisions for due process and protection in evaluation procedures are followed prior to continuing the assessment and intervention process.

CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF THE PROBLEM SOLVING MODEL

A series of components are critical to a complete understanding of Heartland's problem-solving model. First, the dual directions of the arrows in Figure 1 illustrate that the amount and nature of supports provided can increase or decrease based on the intensity of the problem. Thus, the model is not merely a vehicle for accessing special education resources. Rather, the model illustrates how services are provided to all children with school-related problems. This model is applicable to all learners served within the geographic boundaries of Heartland AEA 11.

A second critical feature of Heartland's model is that problem solving at the various levels is, in fact, the same process. The process becomes more intensive and systematic as the nature of a problem warrants. The largest circle in Figure 1 describes the steps used to define problems, develop interventions and evaluate solutions. Information from a variety of sources (review of records, parent and teacher interviews, classroom observations, and perhaps testing of the child's skills) are used to validate that the child's academic, social, or behavioral performance does not meet the demands of the educational environment. The problem solving steps are designed to collect and analyze information on dimensions of the problems that can be used to develop interventions with a high likelihood of success. This distinction is critical because in a problem solving model, assessment focuses less on attributes of the child (like retardation or ADHD-ness), and more on variables in the classroom and school that can be changed to better support the child. Teachers and AEA support staff are involved only in assessment activities that contribute to a better understanding of the instructional, curricular, environmental, and learner factors that contribute to the problem (Heartland AEA 11, 1996).

A common example of this system would be addressing the needs of a child with a reading problem. A potential question to be answered might be "Does the child read fluently?" since reading fluency is a good overall indicator of reading proficiency (Shinn, Good, Knutson, Tilly & Collins, 1996). Collecting problem-focused information about reading fluency might help answer the question. If the child's reading fluency is adequate, the questions might become "Is the child receiving sufficient opportunity to read in class and at home? Does the child receive appropriate feedback reading performance? Does the child monitor meaning while reading?" and so on.

After the problem is defined and factors that contribute to the problem are identified, solutions are generated. Significant staff development efforts have been sponsored or conducted by Heartland AEA 11 to help AEA and LEA staff develop skills in using assessment techniques that link solutions and problems. Staff development is ongoing and addresses areas like collaboration, site-based teaming, and monitoring student progress (Ikeda et al., 1996). After solutions are evaluated, the person responsible for implementing the intervention chooses an intervention method that has a reasonable probability of success based on professional expertise and knowledge of effective practice. Depending on the solution, the interventionist could be one person or a combination of general education teacher, a support person (like a speech and language pathologist or school psychologist), an administrator, or even a parent. Solutions must be feasible and acceptable to the teacher. Evidence is gathered that solutions are implemented with integrity. Implementation of intervention plans require on-going support, technical assistance, resource linking, design review, trouble shooting, reinforcement for the implementors, and monitoring of student progress. Progress monitoring includes frequent data collection gathered under standardized conditions. Data are regularly analyzed so that modifications to the plan are implemented as needed based on progress toward pre-established goals.

SUMMARY

Implementation of a problem-solving service delivery system throughout the past six years has been a challenging though rewarding initiative. The intent of this initiative has been to improve services and outcomes for all children and youth with significant educational problems. This initiative has refocused service delivery from that of determining administrative solutions (e.g., special education placement) to that of determining **educational** solutions.

In the traditional model, students often did not receive services until they were formally entitled to special education. Typically, special education services were delivered in a "pull-out" fashion. In a problem solving model, students receive support and services early on and usually in the general education classroom. Information is gathered on-going, and all information gathered is relevant and geared toward solving the identified problem.

As a result of implementing all aspects of the problem solving model, outcomes of services provided to children are becoming more measurable. Heartland AEA 11 has taken a leadership role by collaborating with LEAs and state agencies to develop the four level problem solving model to work out potential barriers to implementation and to develop an ongoing program of system evaluation.

While significant progress has been made to date, there is a long way yet to go. It has been our experience that systemic school improvement is possible and that intermediate education agencies can provide significant leadership in the reform process. Helping LEAs understand the rationale for reform and providing ongoing staff development are two areas in which leadership can be provided. In addition, intermediate agencies are critical for facilitating collaboration between state agencies and local agencies. Through these collaborative efforts in promoting system reform, intermediate agencies improve services to the most important beneficiaries: the children in the schools and communities in which we work.

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FACILITATING SPECIALIZED INTERVENTION AND INTEGRATION: A COLLABORATIVE SCHOOL-WIDE TEAM ASSISTANCE PROJECT

by
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BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

Thirteen Western New York public school districts receiving special education services and support from a New York State Regional Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) are redesigning instructional and related service delivery for students with disabilities. Collaboration among general educators, special educators and related service personnel in urban, suburban and rural school districts has been facilitated with modest yet encouraging outcomes.

A survey of school districts receiving special education services from BOCES indicated that student study/ teacher assistance team models were inefficient, non-functional, or virtually non-existent. Provisions for pre-referral service options, special education student integration and inclusion were viewed as largely insufficient. Administrators from BOCES and member districts responded to these findings responsibly. Authorization was granted to the Assistant Superintendent for Special Education of BOCES to initiate a professional development project designed to train specialized personnel to facilitate school-wide collaborative intervention, integration/ inclusion service and support assistance for students with learning difficulties and identified disabilities.

It is perhaps interesting to note that the Facilitating Specialized Intervention and Integration (FSII) Project was developed cooperatively by the BOCES Assistant Superintendent for Special Education and a member of Buffalo State College's Department of Exceptional Education. Over many years both have shared a vision of quality education and equity for students with disabilities. This vision has served as the foundation for several collaborative projects and activities to date. Their ongoing discussions and work concerning contemporary issues of school reform and field based problem solving proved timely and contributed to the evolution of this project. The project subsequently planned incorporated "interactive teaming" principles from the work of Morsink, Thomas & Correa (1991) and Thousand (1988).

Following discussions with several faculty members of the Departments of Exceptional and Elementary Education at Buffalo State College a partnership was formed to conduct additional planning and carry out full implementation of the project.

The project's intent was to prepare a highly competent cohort of special educators to serve as facilitators of school-wide collaboration among general and special education teachers, related service personnel, parents, and community stakeholders. In effect, a facilitator assists general and special education teachers who provide instructional and management interventions for students with learning and behavior problems or disabilities. A facilitator identifies and procures services and resources that enhance teacher or staff utilization of instructional and behavioral interventions with students presenting learning and behavioral difficulties or disabilities. Moreover, the FSII professional development project served to reflect BOCES's direct response to the problems and needs of its constituent school districts.

Essentially, the FSII project provided interactive training activities and experiences for a carefully selected cohort of special education teachers. Workshops were designed to focus on FSII competencies; i.e., knowledge and skills needed to function effectively in a facilitation capacity within school settings. The outcomes targeted for project trainees focused on the organization and enhancement of school-wide teacher/student assistance team collaboration and effectiveness. Additionally, FSII trainees would refine and expand their repertoire of adaptive instructional and management strategies for learners either at-risk for referral to the Committee of Special Education or already receiving services or support within general education settings. Furthermore, trainees would be expected to demonstrate competence in initiating staff development and technical assistance opportunities for general and special educators, paraprofessionals, community members, parents, and peers of learners with special educational needs.

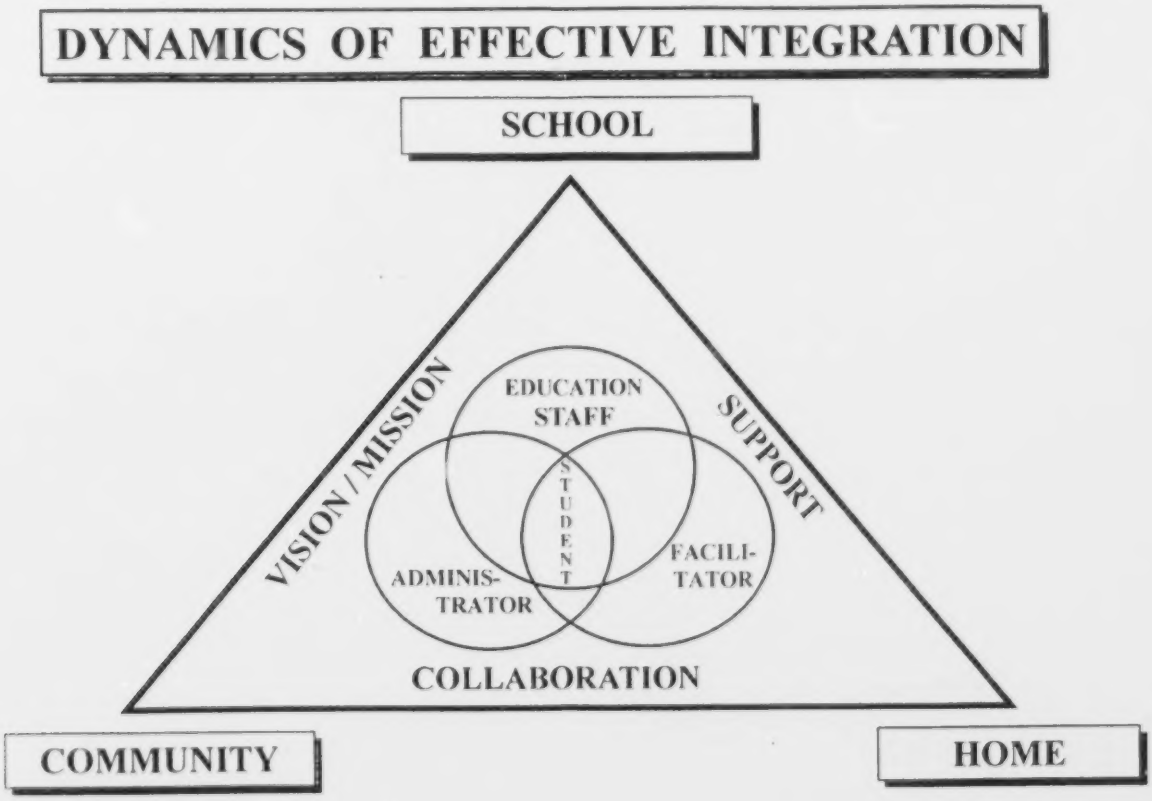

Figure 1. Dynamics of Effective Integration

THE ROLE OF FACILITATOR OF SPECIALIZED INTERVENTION AND INTEGRATION

In delineating the role of the FSII it is helpful to understand the context within which the FSII is expected to function. There are a host of dynamics which are vital to effective educational integration of students presenting learning and behavioral disabilities (see Figure 1). Home, school and community form critical bases which drive the collaboration, vision/mission and support of the administrator, educational staff and facilitator on behalf of the student.

The role functions within the FSII project are quite diverse (see Figure 2). They include broadly defined roles and those more specific such as administrative liaison and team builder in conjunction with organizing, developing and facilitating collaborative school-wide teacher assistance/student study teams. The FSII participant is expected to function as a leader in designing and implementing instructional programs, transition plans, home-school communication and support strategies, and program evaluation. This individual knows about and accesses a variety of instructional materials and resources and initiates staff development and technical assistance opportunities for teachers, aides, peers, community members and parents. Ultimately, this will enhance management and instruction of learners receiving instructional and behavioral intervention at pre-referral or integration stages (Thousand, 1988).

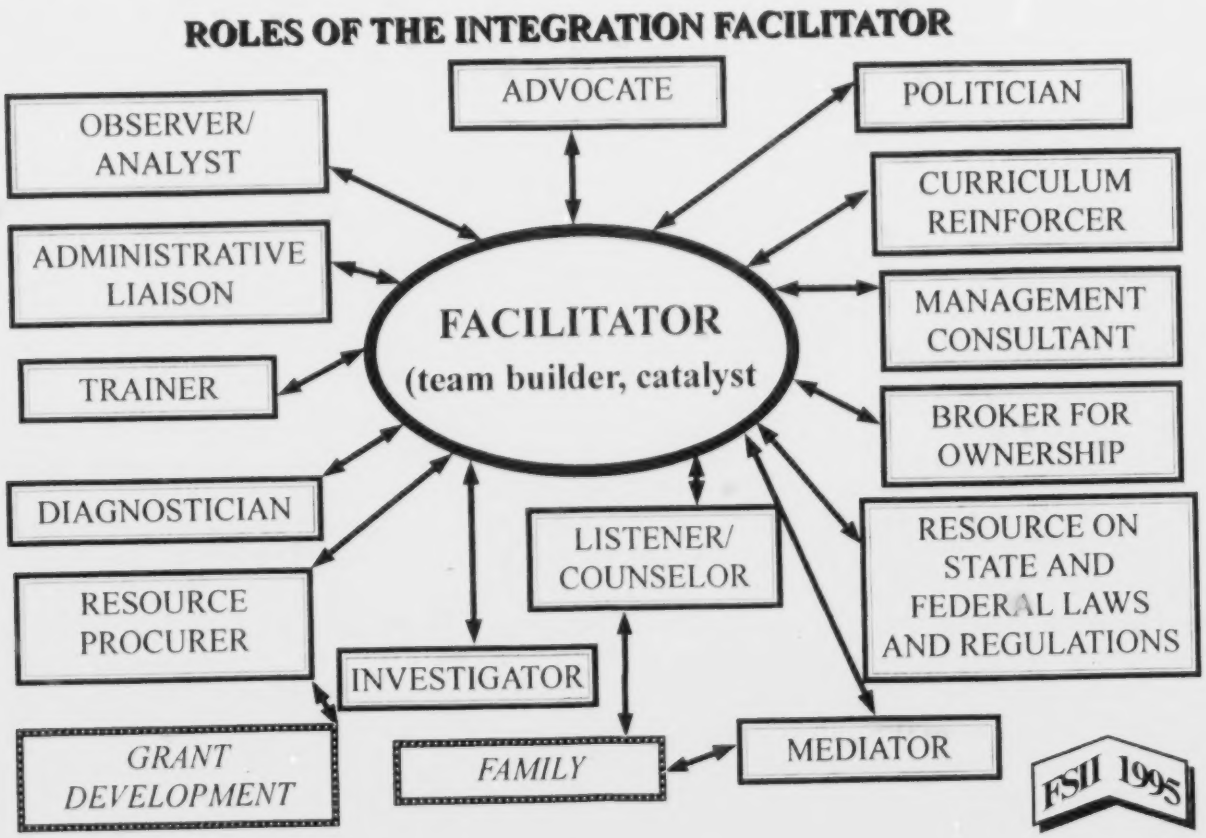

Figure 2. Roles of the Intervention-Integration Facilitator

Those who complete the FSII training can be expected to expedite the process of accessing services needed by special and general education teachers engaged in collaborative pre-referral intervention and integration. It is, therefore, vitally important to establish a clear role definition and dependable working relationships with building administrators, teachers, and staff members. To this end, consistent and open communication styles are essential for timely attention and response to student problems and teacher concerns. Accordingly, it is largely the responsibility of FSII to monitor intervention effects and recommend subsequent action to the student study/teacher assistance team and/or the school's Committee on Special Education.

PROJECT DESIGN

The special education teachers who participated in the FSII project took part in a wide variety of interactive activities. Models of school-wide collaborative team building and professional development targeting special and general education teachers, related service personnel, and parents were examined. Specific foci were directed to assessment, management, adaptive instruction, and evaluation strategies. Other activities engaged project trainees in identifying and accessing appropriate instructional and management resources to augment interventions with students experiencing learning and behavioral difficulties; i.e., students at risk for subsequent referral to the school's Committee for Special Education, or students with disabilities receiving services/support in general education classrooms.

Basically, six competency clusters provided the foci for all FSII Project instructional sessions and workshops (Center for Developmental Disabilities, 1990). Project trainees attended 12 three-hour instructional sessions (36 total hours) and participated in approximately 24 hours of field based follow-up activities. While the competencies were organized as discrete instructional units and activities, they were addressed as integral to one another. By and large, the workshop sessions and field experiences yielded rich and provocative discourse which contributed to genuinely effective networking and interactive team building among the trainees. FSII competency clusters addressed in the project include the following:

1. Staff Development

Facilitators prepare others, i.e., members of building child study or teacher assistance teams, general and special educators, teacher aides, students without handicaps, parents and family members, and school and community members to implement effective instructional programs for learners with mild, moderate or severe disabilities, to demonstrate collaborative teaming skills, and to articulate an understanding of effective educational practices.

2. Technical Assistance

Facilitators provide technical assistance to general and special educators, administrators, and community agency personnel to implement effective educational practices and improve the education of learners with mild to severe handicaps within their local schools and communities.

3. Effective Educational Practices and Adaptive Instruction Strategies

Facilitators articulate the benefits of effective educational practices for learners with mild to severe disabilities. They assist in clarifying issues associated with least restrictive environment, integrated delivery of educational and related services, social integration, community-based instruction, functional curriculum, systematic data-based instruction, home-school partnership, and program evaluation. Facilitators also model

utilization of adaptive instructional strategies including peer tutoring, cooperative group learning, outcomes based instruction, activity selection, computer assisted instruction, multi-aged groupings, and cognitive and cognitive-behavioral learning applications.

4. Consultation, Communication, and Small Group Skills

Facilitators model the utilization of trust-building strategies and techniques to increase effective communication, give and receive positive and critical feedback, and provide appropriate leadership and conflict resolution strategies to school-wide student study and teacher assistance teams, including others responsible for managing and instructing learners with mild, moderate, and severe disabilities.

5. Collaborative Team Building

Facilitators collaborate with school-wide study and assistance teams of parents, general and special educators, and administrators to plan, implement, and evaluate strategies for educating students within their respective school settings.

6. Organizational Skills (Self and Others)

Facilitators formulate and carry out meeting agendas, manage their time, and plan, schedule, and document their professional activities. They also evaluate their efficiency and effectiveness in achieving desired goals and objectives.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION FACTORS

Determining a high quality site for workshop sessions was viewed as most essential. The site obtained for the FSII project was housed in a recently constructed Northern Western New York Regional BOCES educational center which was equidistant for project trainees. Generous support was provided throughout the project. For example, communication was consistent and efficient, alternate meeting sites were readily obtained, instructional resources and materials were abundant, administrators were always available to assist with or participate in workshop sessions, and the overall comfort of project consultants and trainees was enhanced through sufficient nutritional enrichment at each session.

Seven special education teachers were selected to participate in the FSII Professional Development Project. BOCES and participating districts supported half-day releases for participants for each three-hour workshop session. The criteria used to select participants were as follows:

1. Special education teachers in existing program services in BOCES or related school districts;
2. A stated commitment to educating learners with disabilities within least restrictive educational environments;
3. Evidence of three or more years of teaching experience with learners with mild, moderate, and/or severe disabilities;
4. Evidence of leadership and collaborative abilities, including well developed speaking and writing skills;
5. Evidence of successful consultation with professional colleagues;
6. Master's degree in special education or its equivalent in advanced course work, inservice training, and direct service experience;

7. Successful interview with Selection Committee; and
8. Recommendation of Program Supervisor

As indicated earlier, the FSII Project consultants were professors at Buffalo State College in Western New York. They included a specialist in elementary education mathematics and science instruction who also held expertise in adapting instruction for students with mild disabilities in integrated in general education settings. Three additional consultants were special educators with expertise in school leadership and reform, team building, interpersonal communication, program design, educational assessment, curriculum and instructional adaptation, and classroom organization and management.

Project workshop sessions were guided by an agenda that ensured full use of allotted time and maximum interaction among the participants and consultants. Initial sessions clarified the purpose and focus of the project and constructed a foundation for team building and collaborative networking among participants and consultants. Trainee needs were identified through the administration of a survey designed for the FSII Project. This helped to refine the focus of the project and promote ownership of the project by the trainees and consultants. Each workshop session agenda was finalized during regularly scheduled meetings held by the project consultants and BOCES Assistant Superintendent of Special Education. Project objectives and expressed needs and interests of the trainees were carefully analyzed in planning and organizing future sessions.

Each workshop session incorporated interactive and hands-on activities. These included creative problem solving exercises, brainstorming, chart building, and contextualized tasks that nurtured group reflection and decision making. Several workshops that proved highly effective were: 1.) A question and answer session with a regional special education supervisor from the New York State Department of Education. This session focused on future special education priorities proposed by the New York State Education Department and implications for the FSII role and function; 2.) Field visits to school sites implementing intervention/integration programs. For example, an elementary school employing the FSII model in a pilot program was visited. Trainees and project consultants observed integrated classrooms and discussed their observations and role functions of the facilitator with administrative staff, a facilitator, assistance team members and teachers; 3.) Technology workshops presented by instructional technology specialists. Trainees examined technology, multi media applications and other resources needed for "state of the art" technical assistance and planned presentations for teachers, staff, parents and community groups; and 4.) Adaptive instruction and development of a comprehensive FSII reference guide. During workshops trainees examined a variety of adaptive instruction and management strategies and organized source information related to the role and function of the FSII and associated competency clusters.

PROJECT EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

Several evaluative approaches were used throughout the project to assess knowledge and skill acquisition of project trainees. As mentioned earlier, a survey was conducted at the outset of the project to assess the knowledge status and needs of project trainees. Written comments reflecting trainee perceptions of each session's value were elicited as a regular activity concluding each session. Written comments also were solicited and submitted anonymously by a secretarial assistant to the project and forwarded to the project consultants for analysis. Generally, trainee comments reflected continuing and consistent growth in achieving project objectives, content and competencies.

Another approach was designed to assess trainee use of facilitation strategies. Through scenarios depicting integration and pre-referral intervention problems, trainees were required to select or formulate and justify resolution strategies. These were formulated by the trainees and based upon actual school-wide realities. This proved effective in providing trainees with the opportunity to demonstrate competence in identifying and analyzing problems as well as applying concepts and principles acquired during previous workshop sessions.

Project trainees also generalized and documented technical assistance strategies, interventions or other FSII functions designed and carried out in their home schools. These included administering a human exceptionality knowledge inventory to general education elementary teachers and surveying general education teacher management and instruction needs for further analysis and professional development. The comprehensive technical assistance guidebook described earlier reflected the informational expertise developed by the trainees in sections addressing school-wide assistance team building, communication strategies and conflict resolution, nature and needs of students with exceptionality, student assessment approaches, classroom organization and management strategies, and adaptive instruction principles including the implementation of cooperative classroom learning.

In a culminating final workshop session trainees presented detailed reports to the BOCES Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent of Special Education delineating the role and functions of the FSII including logistical considerations associated with case loads and placement of a FSII-trained facilitator within the school's formal organization. Finally, trainees were awarded certificates of recognition for their achievement and contributions to the project.

In the months since the completion of the project, consultants and former trainees have disseminated information about the FSII Professional Development Project through panel presentations at conferences held by the New York State Association of Vocational Educators and the New York State Council for Exceptional Children. Currently, three former trainees are serving in FSII roles. Two are facilitating elementary and middle school level integration programs. Much of their initial effort has been devoted to shaping the identity of the FSII within their respective school settings; e.g., developing school-wide trust and opening avenues for communication and collaboration among special and general education staff and teachers, forming and strengthening teacher assistance and student study teams at the middle school level, and assisting special and general education teachers and staff in developing guidelines and procedures for further integration of students. The third former trainee is functioning as a facilitator at the secondary education level. Increasing access to vocational education programs and developing a transition articulation agreement with a regional community college for students with emotional disabilities have served as targeted goals.

It is genuinely encouraging to find that students with behavior and learning needs and disabilities are experiencing fundamental educational benefits as a result of the leadership and collaborative skills developed by special educators who participated in FSII Professional Development Project.

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FROM WOODSHED TO STATE CAPITOL

by
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Vancouver, Washington

His hero is a German immigrant father who only completed the second grade. His inspiration comes from a former student on the verge of dropping out of school but who is now a college president. He also takes heart from a teacher who "took me to the woodshed" and the late U.S. Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson of Washington, whose statesmanship was a national model.

The man whose life and values were shaped in part by these individuals is Senator Al Bauer, the veteran Washington State legislator who in December was awarded the 1996 Walter G. Turner Award from the American Association of Educational Service Agencies.

This former elementary, junior high, and high school teacher is regarded as the father of educational service agencies in Washington. He was elected to the State Legislature in 1971 and continues today to influence the growth and effectiveness of ESAs, most recently in the changing milieu of telecommunications.

Senator Bauer exemplifies traditional American values in step with the changing everyday needs of its people. Even though his German immigrant father moved half way across the country so his children could get a better education, Bauer dropped out of high school at age 17. He considered a job in a cannery where he made 80-cents an hour a step up from working the family farm for free and going to school.

After a year at the cannery, however, his perceptions changed, and Bauer took advantage of community college classes and the American School of the Air, an early correspondence school available in the Northwest. He then joined the Navy, where he found fellow sailors who couldn't read their training manuals. Helping them set him on a course that's spanned almost a half century and has enriched education on local, state, and national levels.

Senator Bauer offered insights on education and the future of ESAs during an interview at the new Washington State University Vancouver campus, where Bauer Hall honors his contributions to teaching and learning.

Q. You mention the influence on your life of individual teachers. What message would you share with others interested in teaching today's youth?

A. I personally believe that there is no other profession in which I could be so involved in peoples' lives. The rewards are so great when teachers form those relationships of mutual respect and companionship as youth learn how to be good citizens.

New teachers coming in the field today have to be cognizant of the ever-changing attitudes and societal forces affecting students, not to mention TV and home environment. They need fresh ideas and different strategies to relate to this diverse student population.

Q. Teacher preparation programs offer many opportunities for educational service agencies, thanks to legislation you've authored. How can other ESAs be active partners in teacher training?

A. When I first went into the legislature, I felt a great need for giving teachers not only a do-able task, as to class size and curriculum, but also in dealing with students of diverse backgrounds and needs. I did my student teaching at Jefferson High in Portland (an ethnically diverse urban district), but my first job was teaching 5-8 graders in a very rural, small district.

Student teaching programs coordinated by ESAs can ensure that teacher candidates have exposure to varied districts and classroom experiences. (The Senator has also supported ESD/University Professional Development Schools in which teacher training professors can interact with students in local classrooms to keep current with classroom management and instructional strategies.)

ESAs need to be proactive in developing partnerships with community colleges, universities, and technical schools in the wide range of teacher preparation programs and for ongoing professional development activities for practicing teachers. Technology is a key tool to these partnerships.

Q. Speaking of technology, as last year's Chairman of the Senate Higher Education Committee, you developed and spearheaded successful legislation that establishes a K-20 (kindergarten through 20-university doctoral program level) Telecommunications System for the State of Washington. This network will ultimately link families in their homes with their local schools, which in turn will be linked with other schools, universities, libraries, and information bases nationally and internationally. What is your vision for educational telecommunications?

A. Washington's universities and ESDs over the years have been using telecommunications effectively for their individual needs, but collaboration and interfacing were disjointed. The new system will unify all levels of education, libraries, and government to positively impact curriculum, teaching strategies, and access to and application of information. This comprehensive, collaborative approach lends itself to providing a seamless system which can add quality and cost effectiveness to telecommunications applications.

Q. Among the major pieces of legislation and educational laws you have developed in your 26 years in the state legislature have been the rewrite of the Intermediate School District Act of 1969 (Washington's founding educational service agency act), the Basic Education Act of 1977 for full funding of public schools, and legislation that allowed regional service agencies to create pools and trusts for Workers' Compensation, Unemployment and Property-Casualty Risk insurance and provide special education transportation and cooperative purchasing. In what one or two pieces of state legislation do you take most pride?

A. I'd probably have to classify these into two categories: Early Intervention Services and Restructuring of Institutions. I take great pride in the implementation of lower class sizes and funding for teachers in kindergarten through third grade because I am convinced that the early years set the tone for a child's educational future. I am also proud of legislation that required testing of all fourth graders and the remediation and learning assistance programs that provided funding to pick up and provide extra help to those children that test below grade level, especially in reading and math.

Legislation affecting ESDs and regional services falls into the category of the restructuring legislation of which I'm particularly proud. We beefed up ESDs so they can reach out and give a broader range of

services and ensure that children in smaller and rural schools have the same opportunities as students in wealthier districts. ESDs allow students a broader educational picture and do it at cost savings that are measurable. I'm also especially proud of the establishment of a (two-year) teacher probationary period and design of Washington's Basic Education Act to give equity among districts and students. House Bill 1209 (Washington's 1993 School Improvement Act) also fits in here. It makes higher education a partner in teacher preparation, which is a vital part of the equation of school reform and improved student performance.

Q. You have been a strong proponent of partnerships between schools and colleges and with private businesses and other governmental agencies. What advice would you give to regional service agencies in seeking and cementing such partnerships for the future? And what areas do you see as "ripe" for partnering opportunities?

A. Because ESDs are spread across multiple districts, they provide a base from which to generate these services and partnerships. A university can link with an ESD, rather than make arrangements with 30 local school districts, to design and deliver inservices.

I think ESAs need to promote that linkage role and work with the institutions and agencies in their regions and state to blend services and dollars to get the most value from their resources. Areas "ripe" for future growth include teacher training and recruitment, development of strategies for more effective classroom management, use of classrooms as university clinics, and application of electronic and telecommunications hookups. I think the demand for re-training our teacher work force is perhaps the greatest area for ESA involvement.

Q. Why is the existence of ESAs so often questioned in one state or another?

A. Most legislators, when looking at bottom line budgets, are accustomed to funding K-12 education, community colleges, and higher education. They generally have not had experience with an intermediary level of service that stretches over a larger geographic setting. Most, even if they came from small schools, have not experienced the services provided by an ESA, such as special education or teacher training, and they need to be shown the value of cooperative and cost effective regional programs. ESAs have brought positive aspects of curriculum development and teaching to small schools and collectively kept the costs down. In effect, ESAs allow the consolidation of services, without the consolidation of schools or children, and that's a message that is born out in higher rural test scores, which should sell well to legislators representing the country's communities.

Q. What advice would you give ESAs to strengthen the value and governance of regional support agencies in our nation's public education system?

A. Public education is being challenged on many fronts. People look at test scores, relevance of new courses, acquisition of computers and new technologies, and qualifications of teachers. Then, they look at the bottom line. Money. Both our children and financial resources are the most important things in people's lives. We need to do a better job as a nation in putting children first.

ESAs can play a big role as an effective advocate of children and schools. Regionally, they can provide support to smaller and rural schools, bringing their communities equal educational opportunities. ESAs

can serve as a link between each individual school building and the state department of education. You can research and clarify issues and concerns and become a powerful voice on behalf of education to the legislature and Congress. By designing programs and responding to local school and community needs, you can help solve some of the problems that face our nation's schools.

It's not always easy, but ESAs are in the unique position of being close to their customers and able to anticipate and resolve emerging needs. And, when you can do that across your state and the nation, that strength is recognized and reinforced.

PERSPECTIVES
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PERSPECTIVES

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A Journal of Research and Opinion about
Educational Service Agencies

Accountability for ESAs: Is Accreditation the Answer?

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Special thanks are due to the staff of the Oakland Schools Intermediate School District in Waterford, Michigan, for their invaluable assistance in producing this fourth issue of *Perspectives*.

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Introduction

Editing a journal for an audience made up of creative, task-oriented, "can do" practitioners - that's you, our ESA audience - can be quite a challenge. Most of our readers want to know where good ideas and programs are in place. "What works?" "Who's doing it?" "How can I get more information?" "What do I need to do to get started - tomorrow?" We know that and readers have been good about sharing ideas with us. We hear about others at the AAESA national conference and invite presenters to prepare articles for us. We're trying to meet these paramount needs.

On the other hand we assume that organizations of importance - in our case, ESAs - need a sound research base to validate what they are doing and to understand the basic principles of organizational effectiveness for an educational entity that is unique in its roles and mission. Such understandings raise the performance level all ESAs and provide opportunities for continuous improvement.

Dr. E. Robert Stephens, the pre-eminent researcher on service agencies, has been suggesting for a decade that the accountability movement, which has had a growing impact on other government agencies, including public schools, would inevitably focus on ESAs. This is a trend motivated by many forces including the general public feeling that government is too expensive and ineffective. Though the generally prosperous condition of state and local governments in the last few years may have toned down the rhetoric about accountability, the inevitable downturn in the economy will surely unleash the beast of performance validation in perhaps its newest form, accreditation. Other examples of the insistence on accountability of institutions serving the public abound.

For example, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the foremost accrediting body for teacher preparation institutions, is changing its process of accrediting colleges of education from one basically focused on inputs to one based on outputs. At Oakland University we have now been told we must set student performance goals, assess their achievement, aggregate results and use this information to improve the quality of education we provide for students or risk losing accreditation.

Also, some of the bills introduced in Congress this spring to make managed health care more responsive to patient needs included provisions that require HMOs to report "... the percentage of coronary patients who suffer continual chest pain or repeated heart attacks, the number of treated asthmatics who return to normal work schedules without repeated visits to hospital emergency rooms as well as other specific data on mortality, morbidity and patient satisfaction" (*New York Times*, July 5, Section 4, page 1).

Thus, we begin this issue with a rigorously researched and nuanced article by Dr. Stephens and his colleague, Hobart Harmon, about the slowly growing movement in the states toward accountability for service agencies and particularly the newer efforts to accredit such agencies. It is based on some general theories of organizational effectiveness that are applicable to all service agencies, whether or not they are under the glare of accountability legislation. We then offer three state perspectives on the implementation of accountability/accreditation legislation in Texas, Iowa, and Oregon.

Now may be the best time for states not yet involved in such requirements to begin to conceptualize a system of accreditation that is theoretically sound, practical in its details, and positive in its goals. A state department/ESA partnership to "do with" rather than a "do to," top down, initiative will benefit everyone. Perhaps AAESA has a role to play in carrying out this endeavor.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Other articles in this issue deal with specific programs. We begin with a national perspective on service agencies in general and AAESA in particular from our executive director, Brian Talbott. Sue Showers and David Moore discuss how a service agency plays a key role in developing a new approach to teacher certification in Ohio. Frederica Frost and her colleagues look at a multi-agency, multi-level (local districts, service agencies, community colleges) attempt to change organizations by expanding the leadership skills and roles of teachers and other practitioners. Tom Kelly describes a state initiative in New York to share resources and expertise among service agencies all over the state. Bruce Vilders looks at a partnership between a service agency and university in Washington state to provide student teaching opportunities in rural areas, thereby helping to increase the share of competent teachers available to these areas.

We again thank the hard working members of our editorial board for their advice and suggestions to authors and to me, and we solicit suggestions for ways to improve the journal. These suggestions may be shared directly with me, with Brian Talbott, AAESA's executive director, or with members of the Council. A big thanks also to Barbara Hunter for assistance in copy editing.

Most importantly, we urge that copies of *Perspectives* be shared throughout the organization. There are many staff members of service agencies who have never heard of our journal. Members may purchase additional copies from AAESA or may recopy articles but only for use within their own agency.

Bill Keane, Editor
Oakland University
Rochester, Michigan

COMING OF AGE

by
Brian L. Talbott, Ph.D.
Executive Director, AAESA

As we near the close of the 20th century, I am awed by the growth of and need for regional service agencies across the nation. This is evidenced by the fact that AAESA is the fastest growing professional education organization in the country. Having been a superintendent of two different service agencies in the state of Washington for the past 22 years, I have seen the regional concept move from the pioneering phase through the implementation phase and into the partnership and expanded service delivery phase. As I travel the country as AAESA's executive director I see service agencies everywhere delivering quality services to districts and students. Your effectiveness is directly related to both the quality of the boards of education and administrators who lead each organization and the competence of the staff that each agency has been able to attract.

This nation's service agencies are very alike and yet surprisingly different. Though we share a common goal of serving school districts, our strength is found in our ability to deliver customized services reflecting state and local needs. This uniqueness is our strength and, at the same time, can be our weakness. It is a weakness because our educational system doesn't always embrace differences and tends to force fit educational entities into one-size-fits-all educational models. This is an important concept for educational service agencies to understand and protect as we become more effective in responding to our school districts' needs. At the same time, because of our impact at the local, state and national levels, we are finding politicians asking questions about our effectiveness and also challenging why we are receiving increasing proportions of the educational budgets. Many states like New York, Texas, Colorado, Oregon, and Iowa are looking at, or planning to look at, performance reviews and accountability standards.

In order to protect our uniqueness, flexibility and ability to deliver services, we have seen significant growth in statewide ESA organizations. In fact, today 10 states have their own executive directors. This has resulted in statewide coordinated efforts to enhance the effectiveness of the regional service centers in the areas of program delivery, governmental affairs, funding, and public understanding and credibility.

Your national organization has been built upon a strong foundation created by past AAESA council members and three outstanding executive directors. Each of these executive directors, Walt Turner, Lee Christiansen and Bruce Hunter, provided visionary leadership and built upon the strengths of AAESA's membership. One strength which was a cornerstone for the success of each of these executive directors, and continues today, is the spirit of volunteerism.

To enhance this spirit, AAESA implemented, under the leadership of past president Ginny Seccombe, a strategic plan that will take us into the 21st century. The plan, so critical to our future, is built on five major initiatives.

- We will strengthen our ability to affect education policy through appropriate and effective governmental relations activities.
- We will position the organization to meet the needs of a growing and increasingly diverse membership.
- We will develop relationships and partnerships that promote the vision and agenda of AAESA.
- We will expand our capacity to provide relevant information and technical assistance to our members and our public/private partners.
- We will actively promote and support the role of ESAs in utilization of technology.

What does this all mean for you as a member of AAESA? You will see several manifestations of this strategic plan including increased governmental involvement and an up-to-date, user friendly web site. You will see improved communication through our publications and on-line service. Regarding our publications we are enhancing and expanding the effectiveness of AAESA *News* and the AAESA *Bulletin* by expanding the role of Barbara Hunter, our

extremely capable editor. In the area of research we will continue to work with Dr. Bob Stephens and invite others join him in expanding our base of research information. This past year Dr. Stephens wrote the monograph, *Expanding the Vision: New Roles for Educational Service Agencies in Rural School District Improvement*, one of the many services provided through his Institute for Regional and Rural Studies in Education. This year, Dr. Stephens will be joined by Dr. Bill Keane and Dr. Joe Lagana and together they will look at the new roles of metropolitan educational service agencies. And as evidenced by this outstanding issue of *Perspectives*, Dr. Bill Keane edits the only national publication devoted to issues related to the design and operation of educational service agencies throughout America.

At the national level we will remain focused on getting the definition of ESAs into every piece of federal education legislation affecting ESAs. You will see new partnership opportunities with both public and private entities.

As you can see, there is a lot to accomplish in order to be ready for the challenges of the next millennium. With your continuing commitment and volunteerism, ESAs have never been better positioned to effect change and meet the diverse educational needs of your constituencies. AAESA, as your organization, is poised to assist you in meeting your current and future needs. Like you, who serve the needs of your districts and the students who reside within your region, AAESA strives to provide quality services that support our customers — ESAs throughout America. As members you will play the essential role of helping AAESA shape the type of services, both old and new, that will be needed in the decade ahead.

STANDARDS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES ON THE HORIZON

by
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INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the late 1980s, a new chapter started to be written in the continuing search by state interests for the development of more effective strategies that result in greater accountability of public sector educational agencies. The current emphasis is unquestionably on the use of standards and performance measurement for assessing the organizational effectiveness of tax-supported governmental agencies. The widespread insistence on the inclusion of standards that establish performance expectations, and, additionally, call for meaningful ways to demonstrate results in newer accountability system is vastly different from popular strategies in earlier decades.

The emphasis in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, has been characterized by many observers (e.g., Emerson, 1989; Pipho, 1989) as a singular stress on efficiency when support was widespread for using management techniques in operating educational organizations and general governments. Prominent examples of the techniques championed during these two decades included function-object budgeting; planning, programming, budgeting systems (PPBS); management-by-objectives (MBO); zero-based budgeting (ZBB); and zero-sum budgeting.

Pipho (1997) suggests that the newer emphasis has clearly been on the "triumvirate of standards, assessment, and accountability" (p. 673) that together have occupied the attention of members of state policy circles for most of the past two decades. A recent special report published by *Education Week* supports Pipho's assertion. The status of selected state accountability measures in elementary-secondary education presented in the report *Quality Counts: A Report on the Condition of Public Education in the 50 States* (1997) indicates that at the present time, 33 states have adopted standards in the core subjects of English, math, science, and history; 45 states in 1995 had a student assessment program aligned with at least two of the four content areas; 15 states at this time require mastery of the core standards to graduate or be promoted; and various strategies are currently used to hold schools and/or districts accountable for student performance. In 1996, 47 required public reporting, 30 had some form of consequences for poor performance (pp. 34-35).

All highly visible public sector entities are being subjected to the new emphasis on performance accountability. In the case of general governments, many of the most influential professional associations in the field of public administration have supported using performance measurement of the activities of state and local governments. In a recent piece, Ammons (1995) cites a number of prominent groups whose advocacy has given substantial momentum to the movement. These include the American Society for Public Administration, the Government Accounting Standards Board, the Government Finance Officers Association, the International City/County Management Association, and the National Academy of Public Administration (pp. 2-3).

At the federal level, Congress has also been active with the passage in the early part of the decade of a series of laws designed to increase the accountability of federal departments and independent agencies(1). The most significant of

these is the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 that, as stressed by the Government Accounting Office, "forces a shift in the focus of federal agencies—away from such traditional concerns as staffing and activity levels and toward a single overriding issue—results" (*Executive Guide: Effectively Implementing the Government Performance and Results Act*, 1996, p. 1).

Developments in public education in the late 1980s and 1990s have in many respects paralleled those in general government. The same pressures accounting for the interest in making general government more accountable also impact education (e.g., budgetary constraints, rising costs of many government services, the desire to downsize governments at all levels). Moreover, the major claimed benefits of performance measurement are viewed by many in state policy circles to be as applicable to education as to other public service fields (e.g., providing improvements in program and service quality, including an early reading of both strengths and weaknesses, aiding in resource allocation decisions, enhancing planning and budgetary practices, facilitating the evaluation of programs and services).

But there are still other precipitating causes behind the momentum to establish performance accountability systems that are peculiar to education. Perhaps the most prominent is the apparent success of those who have argued that the productivity of public elementary-secondary education has been in a state of decline for several decades, and that this situation must be reversed. One principal way to do this, they argue, is through an accreditation system that features more rigorous standards and performance measurement and, an increasingly popular strategy, state intervention in academically bankrupt schools and school districts.

The huge public elementary-secondary education enterprise in this nation has been the focus of most interest in the development of more rigorous state accountability systems that feature more demanding standards and performance assessment. Interest in measuring and reporting the results of a student's experience in post-secondary education is also strong, though not as developed in most states as in elementary-secondary education, or what is increasingly being called in some quarters, "government schools" (2).

Not all of the components of a very large number of state systems of elementary-secondary education, however, have been concentrated on the accelerated move to impose results-oriented accountability. The most significant excluded component that seemingly has been off the state radar screen are the state networks of educational service agency-type organizations (ESAs). For example, only a small percentage of the existing networks are covered by a state accreditation program.

The authors of this paper believe that state networks of ESAs will increasingly be placed under a comprehensive state accreditation program as part of the movement to establish more meaningful state accountability systems for all educational organizations. This assumption seems almost beyond challenge.

OBJECTIVES OF PAPER

The objectives of this paper are four: (1) Establish the major features of existing state accountability systems for educational service agencies; (2) Describe the main features of existing state accreditation systems for ESAs, the principal state policy instrument of choice for strengthening state accountability and oversight of ESAs; (3) Identify major challenges facing state interests desirous of strengthening ESA accountability practices through a state accreditation system; and, (4) Offer conjectures concerning the direction state accreditation practices are likely to take in the future.

The authors make a distinction between two key terms used in the four statements of objectives—state accountability systems or practices and state accreditation systems. The working definitions of the two terms follow.

State Accountability System. This term is defined to mean the cumulative set of state rules, regulations, and policies that express the state's intent to provide oversight of educational service agencies to ensure that they further the achievement of some prized state policy or policies. Various approaches are employed by the states including fiscal accountability measures, legal compliance accountability measures, and accreditation standards that focus on the processes and procedures used by the agencies and the outcomes of their efforts.

State Accreditation System. This term is used to mean the general statements of expectations held by the state that are applied in the decision to initially approve and/or continue to recognize that an educational service agency has complied with all existing state rules, regulations, and policies as well as demonstrated that it is honoring some valued practice concerning the processes and procedures it uses, as well as meets, exceeds, or fails to satisfy desired outcomes established by the state.

STATE NETWORKS OF ESAs

The description of existing state accountability practices as well as the discussion of major issues and conjectures concerning the future direction of state efforts concentrates on statewide networks of ESAs, or those that are virtually statewide in scope, meaning that three-fourths or more of the local school districts in a state are included in the service region of an ESA.

Table 1
Initial Statewide or Virtual Statewide Networks Included in Project

State	Title of Units	Year Initially Established	Number of Agencies in Network '96-97
Arizona	County Offices of Education	1912	15
Arkansas	Education Service Cooperatives	1985	15
California	Office of County Superintendent of Schools	1959	58
Colorado[1]	Boards of Cooperative Services	1965	14
Connecticut	Regional Education Service Centers	1972	6
Georgia	Regional Education Service Agencies	1966	16
Illinois	Regional Offices of Education	1975	57
Indiana	Educational Service Centers	1973	9
Iowa	Area Education Agencies	1973	9
Kansas[1]	(various titles used)[2]	—	11
Michigan	Intermediate School Districts	1963	57
Minnesota[1]	Educational Cooperative Service Units	1973	8
Montana	County Offices of Education	—	56
Nebraska[1]	Educational Service Units	—	19
New York[1]	Boards of Cooperative Educational Services	1948	38
North Dakota	County Offices of Education	—	53
Ohio[1]	Education Service Centers	1995	71
Oregon	Education Service Districts	1963	21
Pennsylvania	Intermediate Units	1971	29
Texas	Regional Educational Service Centers	1967	20
Utah[1]	Regional Educational Service Agencies	—	5
Washington	Educational Service Districts	1965	9
West Virginia	Regional Educational Service Agencies	1972	8
Wisconsin	Cooperative Educational Service Agencies	1965	12
	TOTAL		633

Notes: [1] Designates virtual statewide network which means ESAs include three-fourths or more of the state's total number of local districts in their service regions.

[2] The 11 ESAs in Kansas use various titles (six use Education Service Center in conjunction with a regional designation; others use various titles, in combination with some geographic designation.

Educational service agencies in 24 states met the criterion of being part of either a statewide or virtual statewide network. As shown in Table 1, 17 of the 24 networks are statewide in scope. A total of 633 organizations are included in the networks, representing what is probably a majority of operating ESAs in the nation. All geographic regions of the country are represented, though the New England and Southern states less so than other regions.

The 24 networks are the products of legislative action or administrative rule making by an agency of state government. The county offices of education in California and Arizona are constitutional offices but still subject to periodic legislative attention. As public entities that expend public funds, whether state, local, or federal, they are likely to be the type of educational organizations covered by some existing accountability measures. Moreover, and importantly, they are also the type of organization likely to be increasingly scrutinized and held accountable for their performance.

EXISTING STATE ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICES FOR ESA NETWORKS

The description of the current status of state accountability practices for ESAs consists of three overviews intended to illustrate the general direction and tendencies of existing state activities. One of the three is admittedly of limited value. When taken together, however, the three suggest a number of important tendencies in current practices.

The first describes major features and the extent of use of current state oversight practices when viewed from the perspective of how these practices impact on the locus of control granted the networks to formulate policies governing their operations.

The second offers an assessment of the relative position of the networks concerning the locus of control for policy development when compared to that generally enjoyed by local education agencies.

The third describes the extent of use of current state accountability systems when organized by their placement into one of the six major state accountability strategies used in an accountability typology developed by Kirst.(3)

Locus of Control for Policy Development

One useful way to establish the general direction of state accountability practices for the ESA networks is to view these from the perspective of the locus of control enjoyed by the networks. Portraying ways in which the state tends to maintain some oversight over the operations of the network provides important information and insight on efforts by the state to create a meaningful check-and-balance on what the ESAs do and cannot do. That is, from this perspective, one can have a sense of the freedom and discretionary authority provided the ESAs to set policies governing their own affairs, as well as the nature of state intervention in ESA matters.

Presented in Table 2 are 21 examples of major state oversight practices placed within seven conventionally used policy categories. Also described in the table is the estimated use of each oversight practice.

What the table does not illustrate is whether and in what ways a particular ESA state network is covered by one or more of the 21 examples. Nor is it possible to ascertain what one or a combination of the 21 examples an individual state is presently using. Inquiries along these lines are beyond the scope of interest here.

Observations. The following observations, however, help provide background information on the nature of existing state accountability practices.

1. A fairly substantial number of the 21 state oversight activities would likely appear on most lists of meaningful accountability measures that ought to be used as a check on the activities of a type of organization designed to provide programs and services to local school districts in their service regions. Certainly the use of a required advisory council composed of representatives of local education agencies would be one of these. It comes as little surprise, then, that a strong majority (defined here to mean three-fourths or more) of the networks are estimated to work under this state requirement. Moreover, this practice not only impacts the governance prerogatives ordinarily assumed by an ESA governing board but shapes decisions in many other policy categories as well, as intended in the adoption of the state practice in the first instance. Another popular state oversight provision that would likely be supported in state and local circles is the near universal prohibition on ESAs against levying taxes

Table 2

Overview of State Accountability Systems from the Perspective of Locus of Control for Policy Development, 1996-97

Policy Category	Examples of Major State Oversight Practices	Estimated Extent of Use[1]
Method of Establishment, Alteration, or Dissolution	• use of guidelines for establishment, alteration or dissolution	SM
	• use of guidelines allowing LEAs to secure services from another ESA, or opt-out of its ESA and join another	VL
	• periodic assessment of the efficacy of the number of ESAs	L
Governance Practices	• required procedures for establishment of governing board	SM
	• required use of advisory council composed of local district staff	SM
	• required granting of budget review authority to advisory council	VL
Staffing Practices	• required adherence to state certification requirements in employment of staff	SM
	• required adherence to state/federal employment and dismissal practices	SM
Financial Practices	• use of required budget format and accounting procedures	SM
	• required annual audit	SM
	• required submission of periodic cost-analysis study	VL
	• prohibition on tax levying authority	SM
	• restriction on use of other revenue generating sources	L
Programming Practices	• required engagement in state prescribed core services	SM
	• required engagement in services requested by LEAs	SM
	• use of guidelines allowing an ESA to market services outside its service region	VL
Acquisition of Facilities	• prohibition on acquisition of space through bonded indebtedness	M
	• restrictions on facility acquisition through purchase or lease-purchase	M
Planning, Evaluation, and Reporting Practices	• required submission of annual report to LEAs	M
	• required submission of annual report to the state	M
	• required participation in periodic accreditation review	L
	• required submission of periodic compliance reports on federal/state funded programs	SM

Notes:

[1]Estimated extent of use:

VL: Very Limited (less than one-fourth of the 24 networks)
L: Limited (one-fourth or more but less than one-half of the 24)
M: Majority (one-half or more but less than three-fourths of the 24)
SM: Strong Majority (three-fourths or more of the 24)

to support the agencies (only four networks can). This practice likely has its rationale grounded, at least in part, in the position that the service agencies ought not to compete with local districts for taxpayer support.

The extraordinary state requirements in Oregon designed to ensure that the ESAs are responsive to local districts have been held up as a prototype of ESA accountability in programming decisions (Stephens & Turner, 1991). A two-step program approval process must be followed before a program can be initiated through a service resolution. (A majority of program offerings makes use of this process.) The decision must first be approved by an advisory council composed of local district staff. It then must be approved by two-thirds of the governing boards of local districts (a provision designed to protect the interests of the smaller enrollment size districts) who also represent at least a majority of the students in the service region (a provision designed to protect the interests of the larger enrollment size districts in the service region) (p. 51).

2. State oversight is most complete in influencing the fiscal policies and practices of the networks. This is expected given the tradition of a strong state presence in the fiscal affairs of public education entities. Campbell and colleagues (1965) reached this conclusion more than three decades ago in one of the early assessments of the role of the state in the decision processes of local districts. This conclusion not only holds true to this day but rather would undoubtedly be made even stronger given the improved technical ability of most states to manage large databases.

3. State interest in keeping many of the ESA networks on a relatively short leash is also evident in the frequent use of other oversight practices. One prominent example is the periodic assessments of the continued efficacy of the number of agencies in the state networks. Probes of this kind have nearly always been initiated by the state. Another example of how the state's desire to closely monitor the efficacy of the ESA network relates to the options generally available to the service agencies for the acquisition of space (e.g., the frequent prohibition on bonded indebtedness). Certainly the restrictions on facility acquisition represent another state fiscal monitoring strategy. They also simultaneously illustrate, however, an important way to maintain a degree of fluidity in the network.

Comparison With Local Districts

The second overview used to help establish the current status of state accountability systems for ESA networks is presented in Table 3. In this approach, the relative position of ESAs vis-à-vis the general status of state accountability measures directed at local education agencies is compared. Use is made of the same conceptual and analytical framework as the preceding approach, the locus of control for policy development.

The general assessment offered is that the ESA networks tend to operate under greater state oversight than local districts in four of the seven broad policy categories: common governance practices, financial practices, programming practices, and the acquisition of facilities. Both types of agencies are judged to operate under comparable state monitoring in two of the three remaining policy categories: method of establishment, alteration and dissolution, and staffing practices, where state oversight measures are probably most parallel.

It is the seventh policy category where a mixed assessment prevails. Both types of organizations tend to be covered by specific planning or reporting requirements to their respective stakeholders, though these procedures certainly differ. The state evaluation requirements, however, are clearly what separates the two. The rapid expansion, especially in the 1990s, of state assessment programs for local districts has at this point not touched most of the ESA networks, as will be established below. Nor has the accelerated use of the concept of state intervention in poorly performing local districts been applied to many ESA networks. A recent report by the Education Commission of the States indicates that 22 states have developed academic bankruptcy laws allowing the state to intervene in districts or schools that do not meet state performance standards (States Bring Power to Take Over Schools, 1997). As will be reported below, only a few state networks of ESAs are covered by comparably provisions.

Use of the Kirst Typology

The third overview used to help establish the current status of ESA state accountability systems is presented in Table 4. Employed in this approach is the Kirst (1990) typology of six major state accountability initiatives. The six, according to Kirst, are to be viewed as broad strategy options that not only "must be tailored to specific state and

Table 3

Comparison of Locus of Control for Policy Development Enjyed by ESAs When Compared to Local Education Agencies, 1996-97

Policy Category	Assessment of Relative Position of ESAs	Comments
Method of Establishment, Alteration,	tends to be comparable	However, some states regularly examine the efficacy of the number of units in the network, unlike the seemingly widespread recent moratorium on local district reorganization.
Governance Practices	tends to be more restrictive	There is a common mandated requirement of an advisory committee composed of local district representatives (other than those required to remain in compliance with federal/state categorical programs); some mandated advisory groups have budget review authority.
Staffing Practices	tends to be comparable	ESAs are generally covered by same state requirements concerning employment of certified staff and licensed staff only, and employment and dismissal procedures.
Financial Practices	tends to be more restrictive	Both units are generally covered by state requirements concerning budget preparation, and accounting and auditing procedures; however, ESAs more restricted in revenue generating options, especially the ability to tax.
Programming Practices	tends to be more restrictive	Many states have identified ESA core services; additionally, deep engagement in federal/state categorical programs influence program decisions; as do mandated advisory councils.
Acquisition of Facilities	tends to be more restrictive	There are more state regulations governing the manner in which many networks allowed to acquire, through purchase or lease-purchase, space to house their programs and services.
Planning, Evaluation, and Reporting Practices	tends to be mixed	Many networks are required to submit annual reports to local districts, and some are required to submit annual plans and budgets to the state for review, and in some cases, state approval.

local contexts" but "must also be combined and interrelated in a sensible way" (p. 7). Kirst makes use of the typology to both review past state accountability measures directed at local districts as well as to organize his discussion of promising developments.

An assessment of current state accountability systems for ESAs, when viewed through the lens of the Kirst typology, suggests that presently most states have concentrated on two of the six major strategies: accountability through monitoring and compliance with standards and regulations, and accountability through the locus of authority. All of the remaining four strategies are judged to have very limited use at the present time.

One of the factors that explains the strong showing of accountability strategies that rely on compliance with standards and regulations is that states in many ways tend to view an ESA as a local school district. In these cases, all regulations and provisions in a state's school code or by-laws governing local districts are applicable to an ESA (e.g.,

Table 4

State Accountability Strategies for ESAs from the Perspective of Kirst's Typology, 1996-97

Kirst's Six Major Strategies	Assessment of Current Use[1]	Comments
1. Accountability as Performance Reporting	very limited	There is little use of performance measures in the small number of existing state accreditation standards.
2. Accountability through Monitoring and Compliance with Standards or Regulations	strong majority	A strong majority of states require annual reports, compliance reports where needed to satisfy federal funding of services, and have in place other regulations governing ESA practices.
3. Accountability through Incentive Systems	very limited	Popular strategies that reward exemplary local schools or local districts or local staff are not applied to ESAs; very limited number of states impose disincentives (e.g., sanctions) against poor performing ESAs.
4. Accountability through Reliance on the Market	very limited	A very limited number of states allow local districts to secure a service from another ESA; very few allow local districts to opt out of its service agency; very few allow an ESA to market its services outside its service region.
5. Accountability through the Locus of Authority	strong majority	A strong majority of states require establishment of an ESA advisory council with the explicit understanding that such a group is to loom large in setting the direction of the agency.
6. Accountability through Changing Roles	very limited	Popular examples of this initiative are not generally applicable (e.g., site-based management); states are reluctant to impose requirements of other policy examples that might be more applicable to a local school (e.g., school-site staff councils).

Notes:

[1]Estimated extent of use:

Very limited: less than one-fourth of the 24 networks
Limited: one-fourth or more but less than one-half of the 24
Majority: one-half or more but less than three-fourths of the 24
Strong majority: three-fourths or more of the 24.

fiscal accounting practices, certification and licensing of staff, safety codes). The primary reason for the strong showing of the accountability strategy that is aimed at changes in the locus of authority is, of course, the widespread requirement that ESAs establish an advisory council.

One could argue that the limited use of the other strategies is more a reflection of the lack of utility of the typology in accurately portraying the depth and breath of state accountability systems for ESAs. While not accepting this line of argument, it is important to stress that the results of the use of this approach should be placed alongside the results of the two preceding profiles. It is the combining of the three that is probably most instructive as background material for portraying the current state accountability practices for ESAs.

EXISTING STATE ACCREDITATION SYSTEMS FOR ESAS

In the preceding section, an attempt was made to describe various state oversight practices that together represent state accountability measures for the ESA networks. Here a description is provided of one of the many accountability measures that is likely to be given even greater prominence in the future—state accreditation of an ESA. The working definition of a state accreditation system cited previously follows:

> The general statements of expectations held by the state that are applied in the decision to initially approve and/or continue to recognize that an educational service agency has complied with all existing state rules, regulations, or policies as well as demonstrated that it is honoring some valued practices concerning the processes and procedures it uses, as well as meets, exceeds, or fails to satisfy desired outcomes established by the state.

State Accreditation Systems, 1989-90

The description of state accreditation practices that follows is based on extensive excerpts of a previous report (Stephens, 1990) on state accreditation systems known to be in place in the 1989-90 school year.

Other articles in this issue will describe features of recent revisions made in the accreditation practices in several states as well as one newly adopted system in a state (Iowa) not included in the 1990 report. This earlier report represents the only known examination of existing practices at the close of the last decade.

There were five objectives of the report. The first was to establish what appears to be the initial intent of the newly formulated state ESA accreditation programs. Next, a description was provided of the principal processes used by the states in the conduct of their accreditation practices. Emphasis here was given to what time frames were used, whether or not there was a requirement for a self-study or external team validation, and what, if any, sanctions were to be imposed on poorly performing units. The third was to establish the nature and scope of standards used with special attention here given to what emphasis, if any, is given to context, input, process, and product variables. This was followed by a discussion of whether or not the states made use of all-important indicators of quality for one or more of the standards. Finally, a number of observations about the present state-of-the-art systems for state accreditation policies and practices for ESAs were then offered.

Six state accreditation systems for ESAs were examined. The legal basis for all were to be found in regulations of the state education agency—Georgia, Nebraska, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, and Wisconsin. Highlights of the study that focuses on the situation in the six states at the start of this decade are presented below, organized around the five major objectives.

Intent of the Accreditation. Improvement of the management and the effectiveness of programs and services and accountability were the two dominant stated goals of a majority of the six state accreditation systems. Illustrative of these twin overriding intents are the statements of purposes of the accreditation policies in effect in the earlier version of the Georgia system (*Georgia Comprehensive Evaluation System: RESA Standards*, 1989). The Georgia plan established that:

"The application of standards will assess not only a RESA's compliance with state law and GBOE policy but also the effectiveness of programs and services and the presence of exemplary educational practices" (p. iii).

The intent of the Nebraska (Rule 84: *Regulations Governing Accreditation of Educational Service Units*, 1989) system is instructive for two reasons. In addition to identifying self-improvement as one of the goals of accreditation, efficient use of resources of the state is also established, and reference is made that the level of performance called for in the accreditation system is to be recognized by all as minimal, not optimal (p. i). The apparent hope was that the ESAs in that state would exceed the called-for minimal levels of expectations, a common anticipation in most accreditation systems of whatever type.

The twin goals of self-improvement and accountability are also evident in the Wisconsin system (*Comparative Educational Service Agency Evaluation Manual*, 1985) that speaks to the benefits that should accrue to CESA personnel who as a result "may study the value and effectiveness of their programs" (p. iii), but, in addition, establishes a second goal of aiding "the state superintendent with meeting the responsibility of having to evaluate the CESAs every third year" (p. 2).

Processes Used. Both diversity and commonalties distinguish the processes used in the six states. For purposes of this analysis, the major processes employed by the states were organized into four principal stages that are not too unlike those used in the late 1980s by the two principal professional education accrediting bodies: the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (*Standards, Procedures, and Policies for the Accreditation of Professional Education Units*, 1987), and the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (*Standards for State Approval of Teacher Education*, 1986). Making use of similar categories to those used by these two national professional education accrediting bodies in prior years was not coincidental for, as will be evident, many of the norms established by the two organizations appear to have greatly influenced state practices concerning their ESA networks.

The four major stages of accreditation processes used are the self-evaluation report, the on-site review procedures, post on-site review procedures, and the use of results. The processes used in the six states in each of these four stages are presented in Table 5.

Standards Employed and Content Covered. The measurement of the quality of the operations and programs and services of a service agency of course should be at the very core of an accreditation plan. The six states approached the development of standards and the content areas generally covered by them in a variety of ways and in differing degrees of comprehensiveness.

Primary emphasis in all instances was given to three general expectations about the way the networks of ESAs were to perform: (1) legal adherence to existing state law and applicable federal statutes; (2) adherence to existing state board of education and state department of education policy; and, (3) the degree to which the agencies achieve some valued practice or judgment about what constitutes either quality, or effectiveness, or both dimensions, in the workings of an education service agency.

The priority given to legal adherence to existing state and appropriate federal laws and compliance with existing policies of the state board or state agency is not surprising, given the public sector nature of the agencies. Moreover, this emphasis is consistent with one of the overriding intents of the state accreditation plan to make the service units accountable. The stress in the standards on some valued practice is consistent with the state desire to reflect in its standards improvement in the working of the service agencies, the second of the twin overriding initial state interests for establishing the accreditation plan.

Little use appeared to be made at this early stage in the design of state standards governing ESA operations of other commonly used approaches to quality measurement for public sector organizations identified by Hatry (1974): the use of absolutes, the use of engineering standards, and comparisons with the private sector.

While the approaches used in the six states to establish standards were relatively uniform, diversity marks the scope of standards addressed by the states as well as the way the states had internally organized their standards. In describing the prevailing patterns, use was made of a fairly conventional perspective that an ESA, like other educational enterprises, consists of a number of basic, near-universal organizational structural characteristics, and that these organizations, like others, make use of a number of processes through which the work of the organization is accomplished.

Table 5

Selected Accreditation Processes Used by the States, 1989-90

Step	Georgia	Nebraska	Ohio	Oregon	Texas	Wisconsin
Effective Date	1990-91	1990-91	1989	1977	1985	1985
1. Completion of Self Study						
• required	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes*	yes**
• frequency	periodically	7 yr.	5 yr.	5 yr.	5 yr.	3 yr.
2. On-Site Review						
• required	yes***	7 yr.	5 yr.	5 yr.	ns	3 yr.
• membership selection	SEA/ESA	SEA/SEA	SEA	SEA/ESA	SEA/ESA	ESA
• membership chair	SEA	ns	SEA	SEA	SEA	ESA
3. Post On-Site Procedures						
• permissable ESA rejoiner	yes	ns	yes	yes	ns	ns
• public disclosure/report	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
• required ESA response	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
4. Use of Results						
• sanctions levied for poor performance	yes	yes	no	yes	no	no
• recognition of exemplary status	yes	no	no	no	no	no

*plus a required annual performance report
**plus a required annual consumer evaluation of services
***plus a required annual legal compliance review by SEA

Key: ESA—education service agency
SEA—state education agency
ns—not specified

Source: Stephens, E. R. (1990). An examination of state accreditation practices for education service agencies. *Research in Rural Education*, 6(3), p. 5.

Although differences exist in the depth of coverage, a majority of the state accreditation systems had in place standards governing the following content areas.

1. The governance subsystem of the units, especially compliance with state legal requirements, that tend to be the same as for local school districts, and the requirement that the agency have written policies.

2. The management subsystem of the units, again especially with regard to compliance with state legal requirements that also tend to be patterned after local school district practices, and the requirement that the ESA administrator hold appropriate administrative certification.

3. The financial subsystem of the units, particularly compliance with state legal requirements including the need to follow uniform accounting, reporting, and auditing procedures.

4. The program and service subsystem of the units, especially compliance with state legal requirements and policies of the state education agencies, and the requirement for periodic program planning as well as periodic program assessment and evaluation.

5. The staffing subsystem of the agencies (again, especially compliance with legal or SEA regulations) regarding appropriate staff certification and the requirement that the units have a set of personnel policies.

As suggested above, the current standards in the states at the start of this decade varied widely in their comprehensiveness. In a relative sense, the Georgia and Texas (*State Plan for Regional Educational Service Centers*, 1988) standards were by far the most detailed. The Nebraska standards were the most limited in number.

The difference in the scope of coverage of various state programs can be explained in several ways. In many respects, the variations appeared to be a reflection of the traditions operating in a state system, especially those having to do with the posture of the state education agency. For example, in states where the state has traditionally maintained a low profile in its position on the volatile issue of accreditation of local school districts, it has tended to approach the question of the accreditation of ESAs in like manner.

A second major explanation for differences in the scope of coverage among the six states related to the statutory roles assigned to the networks. For example, the Oregon system of service agencies (*Standards for Education Service Districts*, 1984) had the statutory responsibility to serve as the local school district boundary board and to provide attendance supervision for member local school systems of fewer than 1,000 students. Consistent with the propensity of states to include standards calling for compliance with state law, the Oregon program included standards that address these roles.

A third major explanation of differences in coverage related to the requirements placed on the ESA networks. For example, in states where there was a requirement that the ESAs maintain an advisory committee of local district personnel to advise the service unit concerning its programs and services, one is likely to find a number of standards that attempt to assess the use of and the role played by such groups.

Use of Indicators. Stephens argued in 1989 that the centerpiece of new state performance accountability systems that will distinguish these programs from earlier state oversight efforts is the use of indicators that provide information on how well educational organizations are performing. The use of indicators of performance represent a critical added step to the use of process standards, the traditional method employed to assess effectiveness. Standards alone that focus on the presence of specific organizational behavior, as valuable a prerequisite as they are for assessing effectiveness, do not necessarily provide insight on the quality of the behavior or whether or not an organization makes use of the results of this activity. Indicators can provide this insight that is so essential for the measurement of organizational effectiveness.

In 1990-91, only one of the six existing state ESA accreditation programs attempted to establish indicators for its standards. Georgia's plan included indicators of legal adherence and, in addition, established what it calls indicators of effectiveness for some, but not all of its standards. (This makes sense for indicators are not appropriate nor are they necessarily important for all standards, just those where there exists a consensus that they are significant and tell something important about the workings of the agency.)

MAJOR CHALLENGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STATE PERFORMANCE ACCREDITATION SYSTEM

The thesis accepted here is that there will be mounting pressure to strengthen existing state accreditation practices now in place, as well as ensure that all state networks of ESAs are covered by an accreditation system that will be characterized by performance standards as well as by performance measures. These additions will represent a major departure from most existing practices. They will place state accreditation programs for ESAs in line with developments in other public sector organizations.

The construction of a state performance accreditation system (SPAS), however, poses a myriad of theoretical, research, technical, and political issues. Our tentative list of the nature of these is presented in Table 6. First, though, consideration is given to what are viewed to be essential building blocks that will go a long way in ensuring that difficult challenges are addressed and the design of the newer systems is successful.

The Essential Building Blocks

The list of major challenges that follows is based on the one overriding assumption that the state, in collaboration with the ESA community and other stakeholders, has in place a strategic plan for the state network that, at a minimum, includes three absolute requirements:

- a vision statement that expresses the values and beliefs concerning what the ESA network might be for the state system of elementary-secondary education

Table 6

Status of State Accreditation Systems, 1990-91 AND 1996-97

Network	State Accreditation Standards 1990-91[1]	1996-97[2]	Comments
Arizona			
Arkansas			
California			
Colorado			
Connecticut			
Georgia	X	X	revised
Illinois			
Indiana			
Iowa		X	established 1996
Kansas			
Michigan			
Minnesota			
Nebraska	X	X	
New York			
			currently being proposed
North Dakota			
Ohio	X	X	
Oregon	X	X	revised
Pennsylvania			
Texas	X[3]	X	revised
Utah			
Washington			
West Virginia			
Wisconsin	X		earlier system apparently in abeyance
Total	6	6	

Notes:

[1] Source: Stephens, E. R. (1990). An examination of state accreditation practices for educational service agencies. *Research in Rural Education*, 6(3), 1-9.

[2] Source: Survey of AAESA State Leaders (1997, February 21). Arlington, VA: American Association of Educational Service Agencies (unpublished).

[3] The state accountability measures in place in 1990-91 for the Texas RESCs were viewed to address many content areas ordinarily covered in an accreditation system. It was for this reason that the RESCs were judged to be operating under a system of accreditation, though not formally recognized as such.

- a comprehensive mission statement that flows from the vision statement, explaining why the network exists, and stating the expectations for the network in results-oriented terms
- a statement of the long-term strategic goals for the network, also in results-oriented terms.

The absence of these three essential prerequisites will virtually ensure that the potential benefits of a state performance accreditation system will not be realized. There is little use, for example, for engaging in a discussion of the overriding goal(s) of the SPAS without benefit of the results of these three critical deliberations. Further, it surely would be counterproductive for all interests—the state, the ESA community, the principal stakeholders—if an attempt were to be made to establish annual performance standards absent long-term strategic goals from which short-term goals ought to flow. Moreover, if ambiguity, confusion, or disagreement is present in the development of performance standards, it follows, then, there will be similar concerns and issues raised regarding the development of the all-important performance measures.

The object of a state performance accreditation system is presumably to assess the organizational effectiveness of the ESAs in the state's network. It is well established that, as Cameron and Whitten (1983) correctly stated sometime ago, "there is not a universal model" (p. 263) of the construct organizational effectiveness. This is so despite the continuing popularity of the topic that has received considerable attention in the policy communities, by practicing professionals, and in the research committees in all major disciplines in the social and behavior sciences.

The high interest in the topic notwithstanding, most observers would agree with Cameron and Whitten's observations that we are still without a meaningful definition of organizational effectiveness, and, it follows, have not yet produced a widely supported theory of effectiveness. Nor is there presently a universally accepted methodology for the assessment of organizational effectiveness. In fact, the construct is still surrounded by a great deal of controversy and heated debate. Organization theorists have advocated a perplexing number of conceptual schemes, analytical points of departure, and models for the study of effectiveness. Moreover, continue Cameron and Whitten, "a multitude of criteria for judging effectiveness have been advanced, each with its own advocates and opponents" (pp. 262-267). This situation in part helps explain the equally divergent number of perspectives that characterize much of the debate at all levels of government concerning what represents excellence in education and how best to achieve it.

These concerns notwithstanding, a decision must be reached concerning what theoretical approach(es) to organizational effectiveness is (are) to drive the construction of the state performance accreditation system for the ESA network, as well as one that is highly compatible with the purpose(s) of the system.

This difficult choice will be greatly informed when action has been taken on the three essential building blocks stated above. It is true, of course, that there may already be in place both a vision statement and a mission statement for the state's network. In situations where this is the case, these should be revisited, but in this case through the lens of their critical role in shaping the SPAS. The third building block, arriving at a statement of long-term strategic goals for the state's network, is likely to be a new experience in most states.

Major Challenges

What follows is a listing of what are judged to be a number of the major challenges facing state interests in the development of a state performance accreditation system. The list of major challenges that are cited in Table 7 is, by design, a lengthy one. The length of the challenges cited merely reflects the complexities surrounding the design of a SPAS as well as the seriousness of embarking on an endeavor that is intended to result in a design that will serve the interests of all parties who have a vital stake in the exercise—the state, the ESA community, and the stakeholders of the network. There are no shortcuts for achieving this worthy goal.

The questions are presented in what is judged to be a useful sequence. Moreover, it is important to stress that there are no right or wrong answers for a number of the questions, although, and importantly in some cases, the answer chosen for a specific question must be consistent with the choice made for another related question(s); and the choices made for all questions must be consistent with the very first question posed—what is to be the overriding goal of the SPAS, or are multiple goals to be pursued, and, if so, what are these?

Table 7

Major Challenges in the Development of a State Performance Accreditation System (SPAS)

Categories	Major Challenges
A. Purpose of the SPAS	1. What is to be the overriding goal of the SPAS, or are multiple goals to be pursued, and if so, what are these?
B. Theoretical Issues	1. What theoretical approach(es) to organizational effectiveness should be used to guide the design of the SPAS that (are) compatible with the agreed-to overriding goal(s) of the SPAS? 2. What conceptual and analytical framework will best capture the complexities of the organizational and operational domains and the program and service domains of the state's ESA network that is most compatible with the previously selected theoretical approach(es)?
C. Implementation Issues	1. What time frame is required for the implementation of the SPAS that will accommodate the expected need to build the organizational capacity of both the state and the ESA network to successfully initiate the system? 2. How can the SPAS and both the state's and individual ESA's fiscal planning and budgeting practices be aligned to assure that the annual and long-term budgetary decisions made by each are highly supportive of the school improvement agenda shared by each?
D. Performance Standards	1. How can the long-term, overriding state strategic goal(s) be translated into specific annual performance standards for the various organizational and operational domains and the program and service domains of the ESA network? 2. How can the state best accommodate state-specific goals for the network with those of an individual ESA in the SPAS? 3. What principles should be used to guide the development of performance standards for both domains?
E. Performance Measures	1. What principles should be used to guide the development of the performance measurement features of the SPAS? 2. What criteria should be used in the selection of the type(s) of outcome performance measures for the program and service domain? 3. How can the outcome performance measures for the program and service domains reflect the level of achievement of immediate, intermediate, as well as ultimate outcomes? 4. How can the outcome performance measurement features of the SPAS accommodate programs and services having multiple outcomes? 5. How can the SPAS best capture the non-quantifiable outcomes of both the organizational and operational domains and the program and service domains of an individual ESA, as well as those of the entire state network? 6. How can the SPAS best capture the possible unanticipated outcomes of both domains for an individual ESA as well as those of the entire state network?
F. Data Collection and Analysis	1. How can the existing management information systems maintained by both the state and individual ESAs be improved and then aligned to facilitate the collection, reporting, and analysis of valid and reliable SPAS data in a timely, cost-effective way that reduces the data processing burden on each to an acceptable level? 2. What is the most appropriate way to disaggregate the outcome performance measures of, especially, the program and service domains so that these will provide policy-relevant information. 3. What is the best way to distinguish and then measure and analyze the outputs and the outcomes of, especially, the program and service domains? 4. How can the impact of a specific program and service be separated from the impact of other factors external to it?

Table 7 (continued)

Major Challenges in the Development of a State Performance Accreditation System (SPAS)

Categories	Major Challenges
G. Use of the Results	1. Is the SPAS to be a high-stakes exercise and, if so, are sanctions to be imposed against a low performing ESA governing board and/or staff, and, if so, on the basis of what criteria, and what is to be the nature of these? 2. Are rewards to be granted a high performing ESA, and, if so, on the basis of what criteria, and what is to be the nature of these criteria? 3. Under what conditions, if any, should comparisons be made of the SPAS review/audit of one ESA with others in the state network?
H. Processes	1. What monitoring steps can be implemented to protect the interests of both the state and an individual ESA in the interim period between a full external review/audit?

SOME PRELIMINARY CONJECTURES ABOUT THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF SPASs

This paper closes with a brief discussion of a number of preliminary conjectures about the further direction of state performance accreditation systems for the 24 statewide or virtual statewide networks. The propositions cited represent what the authors perceive to be the dominant trends likely to occur across all 24 networks, not a prescription for each individual state. Variations will be present in state performance accountability systems just as they presently are in virtually all other contextual features of the environment in which the 24 function.

On the Nature of Conjectures: One More Time

Forecasting the future of any facet of the policy environment in which the 24 statewide or virtual statewide networks will function is always problematic. This is so for several reasons.

On the one hand, as suggested above, the individual state networks have in the past and will likely continue to reflect the political traditions and norms of their respective states. Thus, variations in state oversight practices for the network that are, after all, policy decisions that will be decided in the political arenas, will continue to characterize the 24. The political, economic, and educational traditions and norms of a state help explain existing variations in the nuances of a network's governance, structural, and programming features.

Additionally, forecasting the likely outcome of state policy deliberations in a single state, let alone a fairly significant number of states, is also highly problematic. Not only are there limitations in the use of most forecasting techniques, including the dominant one used here, so too are there clear boundaries in understanding the complexities of the policy making process, that, as suggested above, vary in important ways across the states.

These concerns notwithstanding, a number of preliminary forecasts are nonetheless offered concerning the future direction state performance accreditation practices are likely to take. We do so here on the belief that valuable insights will be gained by initially running forecasts up the flag pole for all to see, and then, hopefully, subsequently critique. There most surely is ample room for debate on any number of issues cited. The earlier exposure the issues receive, the better the final product.

The approach used here would be labeled by Dunn (1994) as representing judgmental forecasting. It relies heavily on informed judgment and produces conjectures. The more rigorous approach of extrapolative forecasting, which relies on projections on the basis of historical trends, is also reflected in the forecasts that follow. As argued by Dunn "the logic of intuitive forecasting is essentially retroductive since analysts begin with a conjectured state of affairs

then work their way back to the data or assumptions necessary to support the conjecture" (p. 241). Dunn also concedes, however, "that inductive, deductive, and retroductive reasoning are never completely separable in practice" (p. 241). Nor are they entirely absent here.

Moreover, as with any exercise that attempts to provide a glimpse of what the future might hold, a number of additional cautions should be noted. One the one hand, the conjectures offered obviously reflect the authors' world view of the strengths and weaknesses of the current state accountability measures for ESAs, as well as what will be necessary to bring existing programs in line with what is being either aggressively argued for or implemented by other public sector entities. Further, the authors' personal predispositions obviously reflect some of our own aspirations for the future, even though an attempt has been made to guard against this. This is true here no less than were others to be engaged in a similar exercise.

Major Conjectures

Ten conjectures on the future direction of state performance accreditation practices are offered. All center on what are judged to be some of the more critical policy challenges in the previous discussion of challenges. That is, they focus on what are viewed to be major policy issues present in the design of a SPAS, as opposed, for example, to technical issues. It is acknowledged, however, that most design issues of a technical nature, as well as those that are more research-oriented, are, or should, have their rationale embedded in a prior policy choice.

The first two conjectures will come as no surprise as they have already been explicitly stated elsewhere in the paper, but are repeated here for emphasis. The two, moreover, are perhaps the safest of the 10 cited.

1. All state ESA networks will be increasingly subjected to more rigorous accountability measures, due in large part to the general acceptance in state policy circles of the face validity of the benefits claimed by advocates of the need for greater accountability of public sector entities. Still another primary precipitating cause is the relatively rapid development of a consensus at the state and federal levels over the past decade around what must be included in an assessment of public sector organizations if the claimed benefits of more rigorous accountability practices are to be realized.

2. The policy instrument of choice of state interests in most situations for the implementation of greater accountability for the state network of ESAs will be the establishment of a state performance accreditation system that will include both performance standards that establish the expectations of the network, as well as performance measures for assessing whether or not the expectations have been realized.

3. Multiple goals will be pursued in most SPASs, in large part because most will feature performance measurement. We tend to agree with Martin and Kettner (1996) who assert that "performance measurement combines three major accountability perspectives into one: the efficiency perspective, the quality perspective, and the effectiveness perspective" (p. 3).

   Though the position of these two authors is directed at the value of performance measurement of a human service program, their view has equal utility for consideration of an organization engaged in the delivery of human services. This is especially so because, as argued by Martin and Kettner, the multiple perspectives "enable performance to be viewed from different perspectives by different stakeholders holding different opinions about the nature of accountability" (p. 3). Moreover, continue Martin and Kettner "performance measurement implies no hierarchy of preference among the three perspectives but rather assumes that all three perspectives are important to at least some stakeholders" (p. 3).

   Clearly, ESAs have multiple stakeholders having potentially divergent views, perhaps more so in important ways than many public sector organizations. This is so in part because as service providers that must accommodate the interests of multiple local school districts and, frequently, individual school sites within these districts. Each of these may have divergent needs and values, as well as differing viewpoints on the most appropriate and useful role of an ESA. Compounding this potential problem is the lack of a clear consensus in the professional community on a seemingly large number of contemporary pedagogical issues.

Nor must the equally multiple interests of the state as a principal stakeholder be minimized. The authors have argued in the past that many state networks, by design or through practice, are the platform where the inevitable clashes between state-local interests are frequently debated, and that this sometimes awkward position can account for the long-term conflict surrounding ESAs in a number of states. There does not appear to be anything in the future that suggests a lessening in the tension in state-local relations. What this means is that, at a minimum, the multiple and frequently conflicting interests of these two principal stakeholders must be reflected in the SPAS. This will be accomplished by an insistence that, at a minimum, all three perspectives—efficiency, quality, effectiveness—are addressed.

4. Most SPASs will ultimately tend to be comprehensive. This will be so for several principal reasons. On the one hand, the anticipated multiple goals of a majority of SPASs suggested above will require an inclusive set of performance standards. Secondly, the inclusion of both an efficiency perspective and an effectiveness perspective in the SPAS will require that evidence of inputs and outputs be monitored and reported, for, absent these, there is no other way to measure effectiveness. Also adding to the anticipated comprehensiveness of most SPASs is the growing pressure that the financial reporting practices of public sector entities provide information that will allow an assessment of "service efforts, costs, and accomplishments," the language used by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board in its advocacy of a design that will enhance the accountability of government agencies (*Service Efforts and Accomplishments Reporting: Its Time Has Come*, 1990). The growing support for money-flow studies in education has the same policy objective. Thus, it seems likely that performance standards focusing on the fiscal planning and budgeting practices will be included in any SPAS.

   Additionally, it is through an inclusive state performance accreditation system that state interests can increasingly pursue the growing recognition that state policy must be cohesive if it is to successfully achieve state policy goals. The cohesiveness of state policy is, of course, one of the principal goals and logic of much of the systemic reform movement argued for by many, especially the Education Commission of the States (1990, 1991) and is seemingly widely acknowledged as essential in the professional literature. Nor has the need for greater coordination between federal support for systemic reform and state and local efforts been ignored (e.g., United States General Accounting Office, 1993). Thus, for this reason it is anticipated that the consolidation of the frequently numerous existing accountability practices as well as the strengthening of state oversight in the form of a comprehensive statement on performance standards and their measurement will be actively pursued.

5. It is anticipated that the essential features of most state performance accreditation systems will be quite similar to those required of federal departments and independent agencies called for in the Government Performance and Results (GPR) Act of 1993. This viewpoint is held for several important reasons. One the one hand, the practices of state governments continue to be greatly influenced by the norms and precedents established by federal agencies, though the process of evolution during policy diffusion, called by some "reinvention" (e.g., Hayes, 1996), would suggest that some changes will occur at the state level. Moreover, the fundamental features of the GPR Act are compatible with those championed by other influential advocates of greater accountability of public sector entities (e.g., Government Accounting Standards Board, Government Finance Officers Association, American Society of Public Information, National Academy of Public Administration).

   Following the lead of the GPR Act, it is anticipated that most SPASs will require that, at a minimum, each ESA: (1) develop and periodically update a strategic plan that establishes the ESA's mission and long-term strategic goals and defines how these support the state's mission and strategic goals for the state network; (2) develop annual plans that describe the performance goals for each standard; (3) identify the performance measures that will be used to assess, annually, the status of performance for achieving each standard; (4) establish how the performance measures will be verified and validated; (5) provide an annual report that compares performance data with the performance goals for that year; and, (6) describe factors that may have caused a performance goal(s) to be unmet and what plans are being taken to meet an unmet goal(s).

   The newly adopted accreditation program for the Iowa AEAs, as well as the newly revised system in place for the Texas RESCs, are both compatible with the six minimal anticipated requirements identified above.

6. The anticipated comprehensiveness of most SPASs clearly suggest that the system will have to be approached incrementally. The need to align both the state and individual ESA fiscal planning and budgeting practices alone, as well as other features of their management information systems, virtually ensures that the system will be implemented over a several year period. Our judgment is that the necessary alignment of the fiscal planning and budgeting practices of both the state and ESAs will be difficult, but not nearly as troublesome as the needed alignment of other aspects of the data systems currently maintained by many states and individual ESAs (i.e., the collection, reporting, and analysis of all inputs, outputs, and, especially outcomes). Equally challenging will be the time required to develop a critical broad consensus on the most appropriate performance standards and performance measurement features of the system (4).

7. States will make use of a variety of sources to establish performance standards and performance measures, and these will change over time. Initially, it would seem that the following sources will be used primarily because they are most likely to garner the needed broad-based consensus: the development of goals and standards and performance based on the goals of an ESA; and, standards and performance measures advanced by professional associations (what some refer to as normative judgment) (5).

   Over time, however, there will be significant pressures to adopt, where possible, benchmarking as another major source for the development of performance standards and performance measures; that is, measuring the performance of one ESA against that of the best-in-class ESA in the state network. Benchmarking is currently a popular planning strategy in the private sector having utility in the public sector as well, so long as certain cautions, most of which are of common sense, are observed. The requirement that performance standards and performance measures reflect a broad consensus of the principal stakeholders of the state network should provide the necessary check that appropriate cautions are observed in the push for the use of benchmarking (6).

8. The performance standards and performance measures in the all important program and service domains will likely be selected from one of the high priority areas identified in the incremental phase-in of most SPASs. Further, this focus will unquestionably concentrate on ways that an ESA can intervene in and impact the variables that enhance the teaching and learning environment of the local school district and individual schools within these districts, and then describe how successfully it has done this. There should be little doubt that a focus on teaching and learning will increasingly be championed in state policy circles as the centerpiece of school improvement efforts in a state system of elementary-secondary education. Nor should there be any doubt that work will continue in the development of more sophisticated ways to insure that this focus remains (i.e., the design of money-flow studies).

9. States will respond in a variety of ways to the pronounced variations in the organizational capacity of individual ESAs in the state network to successfully address the requirements of their SPAS. Three policy options will likely receive most attention: (1) the designation of "centers of excellence," where one or a small number of ESAs will specialized in the production of core programs and services, and then be responsible for the provision of these to other ESAs; (2) the periodic assessment of the efficacy of the number of ESAs in the network, though the demographic and geographic features of large portions of many states place clear limitations on the use of boundary realignments or reorganization as do the advances being made in the development of a statewide telecommunications infrastructure in many states; and (3) the use of an equity factor in the allocation of state resources in support of the network. The potential of the use of one or more of the three policy options cited will likely be fully explored prior to the use of sanctions against a poorly performing ESA, the focus of the next conjecture.

10. The SPASs in most cases will be a high-stakes exercise. The precedent for the use of sanctions of some type is now seemingly well established in the field of education (e.g., against students who fail to meet graduation requirements, against school districts and individual schools in a growing number of states). Of special interest here, several of the "second generation" ESA state accreditation programs are high-stakes exercises in that sanctions may ultimately be brought to bear on continually poor performing ESAs. It is true that the threat of sanctions was present in several of the six "first generation" accreditation systems. What is different is that the newer systems are grounded in a much stronger conceptual foundation. This being so would seem to remove some of the concerns that the imposition of a sanction might be subject to legal challenge.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

An attempt has been made here to establish the major features of existing state accountability programs for educational service agencies. It is assumed here that in the future, a state accreditation system will be the principal state policy choice for strengthening state accountability and oversight of virtually all state networks of ESAs. Moreover, the new generation of state accreditation systems will stress two principal properties: performance standards on both the organizational features of an ESA and the processes it uses to conduct its work, as well as those for the program and service activities of an agency; and, the measurement of the actual performance of the agency against these standards.

Also included in the paper was a discussion on a selected number of the myriad theoretical, research, technical, and political challenges that confront state interests in the design of a state performance accreditation system. The challenges were framed in question form.

In the discussion of the list of challenges, it was stressed that it is absolutely critical that the state, in collaboration with the ESA community and other stakeholders, has in place a strategic plan for the state network that, at a minimum, includes three essential building blocks: (1) a vision statement that expresses the values and beliefs concerning what the ESA network might be for the state system of elementary-secondary education; (2) a mission statement that flows from the vision statement, explains why the network exists, and states the expectations of the network in results-oriented terms; and, (3) a statement of the long-term strategic goals for the network, also in results-oriented terms. Absent these three essential building blocks, the potential benefits of a state performance accreditation system are not likely to be realized.

The paper concludes with a number of conjectures concerning the outcome of the decisions to be made regarding what are viewed to be several of the most critical policy challenges in the tentative list of issues cited. They were presented here to stimulate discussion and provoke debate. The caution is offered that the conjectures will not necessarily apply in all state networks of ESAs. Variations in all facets of the state policy environment in which ESAs function will likely always be true.

Though there will be differences in how states approach the design of a state performance accreditation system, there should be little doubt that most state networks of ESAs will join the small number of existing networks now covered. Clearly the public is relentless in its insistence that all public sector entities be accountable for their performance. It is also clear that substantial refinements have been made, and will continue to be made, for the further development of even more sophisticated ways to hold public sector organizations more accountable.

The authors suggest that it is in the long-term interests of the ESA community to embrace the concept of a state performance accreditation system as a meaningful way to demonstrate for all the potential contributions an ESA network can make in addressing the needs of a state system of elementary-secondary education, and, importantly, be held accountable in doing so. This recommendation holds even should there be a hesitation on the part of state interests to move in this direction. Should this unlikely prospect occur, it is nonetheless in the interests of the ESA community in a state to voluntarily begin the design work leading to the implementation of a performance accountability system. The potential benefits of doing so warrant serious consideration by all those who share the vision that an effective state network of ESAs is an indispensable partner in efforts to bring about improvements in elementary-secondary education regardless of where it takes place—in both metropolitan as well as non-metropolitan areas.

ENDNOTES

1. A recent report by the General Accounting Office (*Executive Guide: Effectively Implementing the Government Performance and Results Act*, June, 1996) summarizes several of what the GAO regards to be the most significant of the actions taken in the first half of the decade. Important Congressional action taken in the 1990s cited by the GAO include:

   (1) The Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act of 1990 that established the position of chief financial officers in 24 of the largest federal departments and agencies (that account for approximately 98 percent of the general gross budget). This act requires annual reports "on the financial condition of government entities and the

status of management controls" (p. 7); (2) the Government Management Reform Act of 1994 that added a requirement for the same 24 departments and agencies "to prepare and have audited financial statements for their entire operations" (p. 7); and, (3) the Information Technology Management Reform Act of 1996 that requires "that agencies set goals, measure performance, and report on progress in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of operations through the use of information technology" (p. 7).

2. A report by Ruppert (1994) for the Education Commission of the States summarized case studies in ten states where attempts were being made to develop student performance measures and other measures of institutional performance as part of the state's post-secondary accountability system. Additionally, the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, has convened a series of workshops over the past several years to explore the status of the accountability movement in this segment of public education, the most recent one in 1995. The report of the last workshop (*The National Assessment of College Student Learning: State-Level Assessment Activities*, 1996) involved representatives from a cross-section of post-secondary institutions and state policy circles.

3. Material presented here in the discussion of objectives 1, 2, and 3 are taken from a draft of Parts I and II of a concept paper on *The Design of Standards and Performance Measures for Educational Services Agencies* (Stephens, 1997).

4. Perhaps one of the most ambitious, broad-based efforts to establish performance measures in the public sector is that imposed on federal departments and independent agencies as a result of the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993. The Act specifies a seven-year implementation period. Two recent reports by the General Accounting Office provide important insights on difficulties being experienced in the implementation activities of various federal agencies—many of which are likely to be experienced in the phasing in of a state performance accreditation system (*Managing for Results: Analytic Challenges in Measuring Performance*, 1997; and, *Managerial Accountability and Flexibility Pilot Did Not Work as Intended*, 1997).

5. There are, of course, numerous other potential approaches and sources that could be drawn upon for establishing performance standards and performance measures. These include: the use of absolutes, the development of what some refer to as engineering standards, the use of analysis to establish performance targets (Hatry, 1974; and Cameron & Whitten, 1983).

6. Kaufman and his colleagues (1996), for example, though supportive of benchmarking for the purpose of comparing the processes used by an organization with another leading organization, caution that "this might hold some interesting and subtle traps" (p. 203). They argue that one should first make certain that the objectives of the leading organization are compatible, the processes used by the leading organization are in fact the most effective and efficient, and, importantly, the other organization is not itself improving and one is "not just copying an old and less effective process" (p. 203).

Another potential rich source of standards and performance measures is to be found in the positions taken by various professional associations on what constitutes "good practice" in a particular domain, or one of its components. Ordinarily, standards put forth by professional organizations represent a consensus of the professional community in the specialty area. Ammons (1996), however, offers several concerns on the over dependence of this source in standard setting. On the other hand "these guidelines are sometimes vulnerable to self-serving motives." (p. 285). Further, cautions Ammons: "Typically, single-service standards ... emphasize process over product, or resource input over performance output. Even where standards for a particular specialty focus on performance objectives or prescribe reasonable performance expectations, they do so out of context, with little regard for the full mosaic of services" (p. 285). Several of Levin's (1980) 10 recommendations for use in evaluating cost analysis studies completed by other organizations also serve as valuable cautions on benchmarking.

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AN ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM FOR REGIONAL EDUCATION SERVICE CENTERS: THE APPROACH IN TEXAS

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In spring 1997, the 75th Texas Legislature approved S.B. 1158 reauthorizing regional education service centers, clearly defining the purposes of the centers, providing a stable revenue stream tied to the Foundation School Program, the state's school funding vehicle, and establishing a system of accountability for the centers. Since the end of the legislative session, executive directors of the service centers and leaders at the Texas Education Agency have worked to put in place the mechanisms to carry out the legislative intent. One of the most challenging and interesting efforts has been focused on the accountability system.

Three sections of the law provide the framework for the system:

> Sec. 8.002. Purpose. Regional education service centers shall:
> (1) assist school districts in improving student performance in each region of the system; (2) enable school districts to operate more efficiently and economically; and (3) implement initiatives assigned by the legislature or the commissioner.
>
> Sec. 8.101. Performance Standards and Indicators. The commissioner shall establish performance standards and indicators for regional education service centers that measure the achievement of the objectives in Section 8.002. Performance standards and indicators must include the following:
>
> (1) student performance in district served;
>
> (2) district effectiveness and efficiency in districts served resulting from technical assistance and program support;
>
> (3) direct services provided or regionally shared services arranged by the service center which produce more economical and efficient school operations;
>
> (4) direct services provided or regionally shared services arranged by the service center which provide for assistance in core services; and
>
> (5) grants received for implementation of state initiatives and the results achieved by the service center under the terms of the grant contract.
>
> Section 8.103. Annual Evaluation. The commissioner shall conduct an annual evaluation of each executive director and regional education service center. Each evaluation must include:

(1) an audit of the center's finances;

(2) a review of the center's performance on the indicators adopted under Section 8.101;

(3) a review of client satisfaction with services provided under Subchapter B; and

(4) a review of any other factor the commissioner determines to be appropriate.

During fall 1997, senior staff of the Texas Education Agency, working collaboratively with the executive directors of the education service centers, defined the standards and indicators by which service centers will be evaluated. In addition, a process for use of those standards and indicators was developed which is twofold: 1) provide the basis for the commissioner's performance evaluation of the executive director, and 2) define the content for presentation during the prescribed hearing by the regional board of directors.

For completion of the performance evaluation of each executive director, a form was developed for self-assessment. That form requires the director to rate his/her region/center's performance on each indicator as satisfactory, commendable, or outstanding progress. Following the rating, the executive director provides a brief (100 to 150 words) rationale for the rating.

Listed below are the standards and indicators by which the service centers will be judged:

Standard I. Student performance is increasing within the ESC region.
Indicators:

1. TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) performance within the region is moving toward the 90% standard of excellence in the Texas accountability system.
2. Gaps in TAAS performance among student groups are narrowing.
3. TAAS performance is increasing.
4. Dropout rates are decreasing.
5. Attendance rates are increasing.

Standard II. The ESC assists districts in increasing efficiency, effectiveness, and economy of operations.
Indicators:

1. Efficiency and economy are improving in districts served by ESC technical assistance, program support, and core services.
2. ESC services and regionally shared services arranged by the ESC are improving economy and efficiency of school operations according to results obtained from external client surveys and other evidence.
3. Efficiency and effectiveness of ESC operations are demonstrated in fiscal accountability through appropriately priced programs and services, according to results obtained from external client surveys and other evidence.

Standard III. The ESC advances statewide initiatives in the region for the current biennium.
Indicators:

1. The ESC supports the Texas Reading Initiative (TRI).
2. The ESC supports implementation of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).
3. The ESC participates in grant-funded projects to implement state initiatives.

4. The ESC supports the decentralization of authority and responsibility for public education through support to school districts within the region. (As part of the legislatively mandated downsizing of the Texas Education Agency, ESCs have been assigned technical assistance responsibility for specific program areas.)

5. Commitment to employment equity is evident in all ESC operations and initiatives.

The indicators refer to external client surveys, four of which are currently under development. The Texas Education Agency has contracted with the Texas Center for Educational Research for survey development, administration, and analysis of the results with completion expected by late fall.

In the initial cycle of use (December 1997 - January 1998), the self-evaluation (since client survey data were not yet available) and the personal conference with the commissioner of education were very effective in providing structure for the evaluative dialogue. Success stories were shared and areas of continuing challenge were identified.

The next cycle (December 1998) will include access to the external client survey results. Executive directors will consider these responses in the self-evaluation and the commissioner will include discussion of survey results in the evaluative conference.

The process continues with two additional major steps: the local board's use of the commissioner's evaluative feedback and the board's public report on center performance.

Following the evaluative conference, the commissioner provides a written summary of his assessment of the executive director's performance. If the assessment is satisfactory or better, the board is authorized to continue the employment of the executive director. Although the board may conduct a formal evaluation using a locally developed process, the trend appears to be use of the same self-evaluation report provided to the commissioner. Upon completion of the local evaluation with satisfactory results, the board may extend the employment arrangement.

While one might assume that an unsatisfactory assessment at either level might lead to termination of employment, that situation has not yet occurred. If the commissioner and the local board agree, the decision should be easy; however, should they disagree, some tests of the system would surely ensue.

The final step will provide a report to the public on each center's performance on the standards and indicators. Each center's board of directors must conduct a hearing prior to adoption of the budget for the following year; therefore, the hearings will occur for the first time in August 1998.

The accountability system is certainly in the early stages, but it holds promise for being highly effective. It clearly communicates expectations that flow from statutory purposes, and it stretches individuals and centers to exceed the "acceptable" level. The processes ensure face-to-face dialogue, with opportunity for offering and providing support. If continued implementation reflects the integrity and commitment with which the process has begun, it should indeed prove beneficial for the public education system in Texas.

OREGON'S REGIONAL EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCIES: EVOLUTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY FROM TERRITORIAL COMMISSIONER TO EDUCATION SERVICE DISTRICT

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In their 160-year history, Oregon's education service districts have had several names including office of county school commissioner, office of county school superintendent, county rural school office, and intermediate education service district. The naming and renaming has, for the most part, been related to modifications made in the functions of the agencies. As functions of the agencies have changed and evolved so has the process for their accountability to the citizens.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

In their earliest form, the duties of the regional agency were regulatory and administrative. The primary accountability was to the voters of the region. The county school superintendent was an elective office.

Later in the 19th century, a department of education was instituted within state government. It had responsibility for state level oversight and leadership of public education. The regional agency's role was expanded to provide support for the work of the state agency. Although county school superintendents retained substantial autonomy in conducting their work and remained accountable through the elective process, the level of accountability to a state-level authority was also increased.

During the early part of the 20th century, an additional level of accountability was introduced when county boards of education were created. Initially, these citizen boards were appointed by the elected county school superintendent. Later, the board positions became popularly elected. For a period, both the superintendent and the boards were elected. Later, when the position of superintendent became appointed by the board, the lines of accountability were clarified.

In the early 1960s, Oregon's regional education agencies were transformed from being largely administrative and regulatory entities to largely providers of programs and services. The agencies were renamed intermediate education districts and later, education service districts, to reflect their new roles. The transformation was accompanied by evolving measures of accountability.

The first measure involved accountability for the services provided to local school districts. Each service was subject to an annual sunset provision which involved a super-majority approval process by the member school districts. This was generally called "the resolution process" in reference to its provision that each service or program provided to schools required an affirmative resolution by two-thirds of the boards of the local school districts and that the affirmative two-thirds must represent a majority of the students in the regional service area. A second accountability provision required that each program offered under the resolution process be approved annually by the state superintendent of public instruction. The latter provision was later rescinded.

STATE STANDARDS

In 1977, a state-level accreditation or standardization process was instituted.

Authority. The statutes that currently authorize and govern Oregon education service districts contain a provision which states: "The State Board of Education ... shall establish standards to determine the adequacy of services and facilities provided by the education service districts." The statute states the criteria for the standards: "The State Board shall consider the most economic method of providing services and facilities, the quality of the services and facilities according the best educational standards, and the needs of the students." [ORS 217 (1)] Read in isolation, this section of statute appears to give the state board the primary role in determining the standards for ESDs. However, the statutes also lay down specific rules under which ESDs operate. For example, ORS 334.225 (1) specifies that, "The education service district board shall employ a superintendent who must hold an administrative license as a superintendent." These statutory standards primarily provide direction on how an ESD's internal operations will be conducted and include sections on such matters as fiscal procedures, powers and functioning of the board, and the management of real property. The statutory standards and those adopted by the state board carry equal weight in the standardization process.

Developmental Process. While the state board of education is clearly delegated the responsibility for developing and adopting standards, in practice the board has sought and accepted the advice of a wide spectrum of educators and the general public before any adoptions are completed. During the most recent revisions of the standards, the state board appointed a 25-person committee to work with board representatives in recommending the standards for adoption. The committee was chaired by a superintendent of a local school district and included representatives from the elected boards and staffs of ESDs. The board contracted with a retired educator to provide dedicated staffing for the work of the standards writing committee.

Following completion of the committee's work, the draft standards were circulated throughout the state for suggestions. Formal hearings were held to receive recommendations. Only after a thorough review by interested and affected parties did the board formally adopt the standards.

Characteristics. The standards are formally adopted as a section of the Oregon Administrative Rules (Chapter 581, Division 24). The rules in the division can generally be grouped into four categories:

1. Rules on the internal operations of an ESD. These sections contain requirements in addition to those contained in statute and govern areas such as budgeting and accounting practice and the role of advisors to the board.

2. Rules of how an ESD will relate with its component school districts and with other entities. These sections include rules for determining which services should be provided to local districts and how those services will be evaluated.

3. Rules defining specific services that each ESD will perform. These sections include required programs such as attendance and truancy and assistance to local districts with budgeting and accounting procedures.

4. Rules defining the administration of the standardization process. These rules and the process will be discussed in the following section.

Implementation Process. The state board of education has adopted a two-part process of accumulating information to assure that each ESD is in "substantial compliance with applicable statutes and rules" that constitute the standards.

Annual Report. The first part of the information accumulation process is a report filed annually by each ESD. The content of the report is detailed in a section of the standards, OAR 581-24-226, Assessment and Evaluation of Services.

> (1) Each district board shall file by October 31 of each year with the Superintendent of Public Instruction an annual report to include a completed self-appraisal report and a service and performance summary.

(2) To adequately complete the report, the district shall have on file information regarding the process and implementation of an assessment procedure, including: (a) description of the services provided with appropriate documentation of the quantitative data gathered; (b) numerical accounting of district personnel by job description and service area; and (c) statement of operational costs for each service provided.

(3) In addition, the district shall have completed an evaluation of the assessment data in relation to the service goals, and shall have on file: (a) information obtained in the assessment activity; (b) summary of the reports from components (local districts) regarding services provided by the district; and (c) list of deficiencies with plans for correction.

This report serves two important purposes. It provides through an internal review process conducted by each ESD assurances to the state board, the ESD board and ESD constituents that the ESD is in compliance with standards. The reports collectively also provide a body of data that can be referenced in the development of statewide reports about ESD services.

Site Visit. The second part of the information accumulation process is a formal visit to each ESD.

> ... an on-site evaluation of the district shall be done at intervals not to exceed five years. The evaluation team named by the department (Oregon Department of Education) should use the annual evaluation report, district records, and the on-site evaluations in determining the degree to which these standards are met. [OAR 581-24-210 (3)]
>
> The on-site visit will be conducted by a team chaired by a department staff person with additional members from the department, other education service districts and components ...[OAR 581-24-210 (6)]

Typically, the site visit occurs over a several-month period and includes at least three separate contacts between the site visit team and the ESD. The first contact is a meeting held at the ESD and involves the team leader and key members of the ESD staff. The purpose is to review the process and to have the ESD identify service areas to be given special attention by the team. Following this contact, the team leader recruits a team of three to five educators or board members who have the areas of expertise appropriate to the agency.

The second contact involves only the team leader and the ESD staff. The purpose of this contact is to complete a review of documents that will validate the level at which various standards are met. The team leader reviews district policies, personnel files, the budget, the fiscal audit and related documents and may interview selected staff members regarding the contents of the documents. The intent of this visit is to complete the review of each of the standards that can be met by a document review and to informally notify the ESD of any areas that may need attention.

The third contact involves the entire team over a three to four day period. Its primary focus is on ESD services and the processes used in determining the programs offered, their quality, and the method of evaluation. This contact includes interviews with ESD program staff and with representatives of each component school district. The completion of this contact is the end of the site visit and is the point at which the reporting process described below commences.

In practice, the purpose of the site visit has been expanded beyond assuring that an ESD is in compliance with standards. Through agreements reached between the state department and representatives of ESDs and local school districts, two additional purposes have been written into the procedures manual: (1) "to provide to the ESD technical assistance as needed" and, (2) "to identify and document promising practices." (ODE, Review of Standards, 1997)

The Product. The product of the on-site visit including the review of annual reports is addressed in [OAR 581-24-210 (7)]. "The chair of the team shall, within 30 days of the visit, present to the district a draft report of the team's findings. The district's response must be received by the department not later than 30 days after the district's receipt of the report."

The required reporting process is continued in OAR 581-24-215.

(1) The district's standardization status shall be determined by the state superintendent of public instruction and reported to the district not later than 90 days from the conclusion of the on-site visit. The official classification shall consider the annual report including the self-appraisal, service and performance summary, district records, the on-site evaluation, and the district's response.
(2) The classification shall be: (a) standard district; or (b) substandard district.

In practice, in addition to the information required by standards, the report may include suggestions for modifications to practices or programs, especially in areas that the ESD has requested special attention from the team. It also includes an appendix containing at least two descriptions of promising practices or programs that the ESD and the team believe will be of value and interest to other educators.

Sanctions. The legislature, in addition to requiring the state board of education to establish and implement a system of standards, also requires the board to implement a system of sanctions for ESDs that do not meet the standards.

> When the state board determines pursuant to rule that an education service district is substandard, the district designated substandard shall file a plan to meet standards over a specified period of time. The state board may accept, reject, or modify the plan and order the substandard district to comply with the plan as approved by the state board. The state board shall establish by rule appropriate sanctions for noncompliance. [ORS 334.217 (2)]

Two types of sanctions have been adopted by the board.

> The board (1) may withhold funds from the state school fund allocation or (2) may merge a substandard district with a contiguous standard district if, after the district has been provided substantial time and technical assistance, (it) has made unsatisfactory progress toward meeting the correction plan, or cannot find, other acceptable alternatives. [OAR 581-24-215 (5)]

In the history of using the standardization process, no ESD has been declared substandard; thus neither sanction has been applied. In part this is because of strong commitments by the state board and the Oregon Association of Education Service Districts (OAESD) that any area of deficiency be identified early and that, once identified, the ESD and the department of education will collaborate to make necessary corrections.

The state board, in cooperation with the ESDs, has also crafted another tool, the standards waiver process, intended to "encourage districts (ESDs) to develop carefully planned pilot or experimental services." When such a service would cause an ESD to be not in compliance with specific standards, it may petition the state board for a waiver from those standards. Generally, however, the board may not grant a waiver for a statutory requirement. The current waiver process has been used only one time since its inception in 1994.

SUMMARY

The accountability process for Oregon's regional education service agencies has evolved over the years. Initially it relied on the wisdom of the citizens to elect a competent official. Today, it is a multifaceted system that includes elected governing boards, annual program approvals by component school districts, and the application of written state standards.

Written standards have been in place for more than 20 years. A major review of the standards occurred in 1994 following amendments to governing statutes. Some changes were made in the content of the standards because of legislated changes in functions of ESDs. No significant changes were made in the overall process with the exception that the required annual report was changed from a format determined locally to one that is standard for all ESDs.

ESDs in Oregon are quite varied both geographically and demographically. They range from Multnomah with a budget of $48 million serving 85,000 students in a 465-square-mile area to Harney with a budget of $2.3 million serving fewer than 1,500 students in an area larger than 10,000 square miles. The state standards and the process for

their administration attempt to address this diversity. While certain operational procedures and a limited number of services are required of all ESDs, a major focus of the standards is on the processes that assure that ESDs and their component districts collaborate in defining service needs, determining which programs will be provided, and evaluating program outcomes.

This emphasis on collaboration extends to determining the content of the standards and the processes for administering them. OAESD has worked in partnership with the state board of education in writing and rewriting the standards. Association members also serve along with state employees on each site visit and in the preparation of the resulting report.

Any success that Oregon has experienced with its regional education service agency accreditation process has been and continues to be strongly related to its acceptance and sense of ownership by all of the affected educational partners and their willingness to be actively involved in its implementation.

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IOWA'S AREA EDUCATION AGENCY ACCREDITATION STANDARDS: MOVING TOWARDS ALIGNMENT OF AN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

by
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In 1975, Iowa's legislature dissolved the county education system and created 15 area education agencies. Since that time, each agency has responded to federal and state special education legislation and rules, delivered media services to meet the intent of Iowa rules, and created educational services to respond to the needs of local school districts and emerging educational needs. The rules for special education and media services were, in most cases, numerous, comprehensive and specific, while the rules for educational services were few, flexible, and broad. These differences in rules provided opportunities for AEAs to be flexible in service delivery while at the same time led to diversity in the type of educational services available to local school districts across the state.

Over the past 22 years, separate plans for each AEA division were required to be submitted to the Iowa Department of Education. The plans had different timelines, different responses from different divisions in the department, and usually had little coordination and collaboration between AEA divisions and department divisions when plans were formulated and reviewed. Although local school districts, non-public schools, and teacher education preparation programs were either approved or accredited by the state board of education, no such comprehensive review was stipulated in the Code of Iowa for AEAs.

The system just described was not unusual for the times. Separateness was the way we worked in schools. Special education teachers provided services to populations that were usually separated from the rest of the school population, media services were requested from schools with no expectation that technology would be integrated into the school environment, and math, science, and staff development were separate and not expected to be part of the whole. Today, much has changed. School improvement in a comprehensive fashion is now our work. The process of meeting the diverse needs of all students in caring school environments that are integrated, rich with technology, and aligned with community expectations is changing the delivery of services to schools and school districts. It is also the expectation that all of us are accountable, not only to the taxpayers that provide the financial support, but also to the parents, to the community, and most of all to the students.

These expectations, along with others, led to the passage of legislation during spring 1996 requiring the accreditation of AEAs by the state board of education. Accreditation standards and the process of accreditation are now detailed in Chapter 72 of the Iowa Administrative Code. The standards list the requirements for the educational, special education, and media services provided by an AEA.

Programs and services that meet the following standards must be accessible to all accredited public and non-public schools located within the AEA's boundaries:

1. school-community planning that includes methods and processes that assist schools in needs assessment, development of goals, evaluation, and establishing collaborative relationships;

2. professional development that facilitates growth of instructional, administrative, and support personnel through the development of skills, techniques, knowledge, and understanding of educational research and best practices to support school improvement;

3. curriculum development, instruction, and assessment in the areas of reading, language arts, mathematics, and science that advance research-based methodologies and provide the analysis of student achievement data, establishment of rigorous standards, use of qualitative and quantitative assessment techniques, and integrate technology;

4. special education that implements processes of identification, provision of support and itinerant services, procedures for individualized education programs, evaluation of services, professional development, integration of services, and a process of monitoring school district compliance;

5. instructional media services, which include consultation, delivery of information and resources both physically and electronically, instructional resources to support professional development and teaching and learning, and production and preparation of educational materials; and

6. school technology that provides a plan based on the needs of schools served to further school improvement efforts.

It is clear through the standards that those who receive the services of an AEA should have a great deal of input, not only into the development of the services, but in the evaluation of the services. Indicators of quality included in the rules require that AEA programs and services must address the following: specific student, teacher, and school needs evidenced in local school improvement plans; improvement of student learning evidenced through local school district student performance; improvement of teaching evidenced through the adoption or application of practices, strategies, and information in local school district classrooms and schools which were incorporated in the professional development activities of the AEA; cost efficiency and timeliness; and customer satisfaction.

The accreditation process requires a comprehensive three-year plan that coordinates the services offered by the AEA. Representatives of the department and the AEAs developed a technical assistance manual to assist in the development of the comprehensive plan. Each AEA plan outlines a comprehensive needs assessment, development of programs and services for each required standard with intended results, and provision of data on the quality and effectiveness of the programs and services. The first comprehensive plan for an AEA was filed on March 1, 1998.

To begin the process of accreditation, all AEAs were considered accredited on October 1, 1997. They are expected to continue the accreditation through the implementation of programs and services aligned with the accreditation standards, submission of a comprehensive plan, yearly updates, and demonstration of quality programs and services through the site visit. Site visitations will commence with the 1998-99 school year, with five AEAs visited each year by an accreditation team composed of department staff, peers from other AEAs, and representatives of the school districts served. The team will review the comprehensive plan of the agency and, upon completion of the site visit, determine whether the requirements have been met. Both oral and written exit reports will detail the strengths and weaknesses, if any, for each accreditation standard and will advise the AEA of available resources and technical assistance to enhance the strengths and improve the areas of weakness. The accreditation team will forward a recommendation for accreditation to the director of the Iowa Department of Education for state board consideration.

As programs and services are refined, developed, and implemented to meet the new standards and the needs of schools and school districts, the separateness described earlier should be less evident, with greater equity of services available across the state to local school districts. Because AEAs are an integral part of the state support system to local schools, the standards and accreditation process provide a common framework of AEA programs and services that can be expected by all AEA customers. Although the department and the state board must provide oversight, the accreditation process provides opportunities for collaboration and communication between the state department and the regional support system.

CAN EDUCATORS RESPONSIBLY LICENSE EACH OTHER?

by
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THE VISION

Imagine a group of teachers and administrators discussing whether professional development activities are in concert with building and district goals. Imagine a teacher designing a five-year individual professional development plan aligned with her goals, students' goals, and her building's goals. Imagine that teacher meeting with other educators and discussing her professional development plan, having collegial dialogue and obtaining support, and then implementing her goals, designing a portfolio and meeting with her group occasionally. This is what educators in Ohio could be experiencing as Senate Bill 230 is implemented.

THE LAW

Under the 1987 standards, teachers could obtain one of three certificates (provisional, professional, or permanent). To renew a four-year certificate, for example, educators could take six hours of course work or 18 continuing education units and, for each year of experience, the requirement was reduced by one semester hour or three CEUs. Educators could submit any course work to meet the requirement; even real estate courses were acceptable. There was no coherence to credits submitted, no tie to student learning, and renewal was based on seat time.

In October 1996, with the adoption of the new Teacher Education and Licensure Standards, the state board of education initiated a new era of professional development. The standards, which became effective in January 1998, set out a continuum of professional development that begins with preservice education and continues throughout an educator's career, with the intent of continuous professional growth. In the future, a five-year license will be issued instead of the various certificates. Licenses will require that an educator complete six hours of semester credit, 18 CEUs or the equivalent of 180 hours of other professional development activities. Educators must submit a five-year plan based on the needs of the district, building, students, and himself or herself. No credit will be given for years of experience.

These plans will be approved by a Local Professional Development Committee (LPDC). LPDCs were established to ensure that professional development would align with the ongoing continuous improvement of each school district and building. Each district or consortium of districts in the state of Ohio must have at least one LPDC committee. The committee must be made up of three classroom teachers and two administrators. If the district has a bargaining unit, the bargaining unit selects the teacher representatives. A district may choose to have more than one committee; for example, each building could have an LPDC committee or committees could be developed for grade level or subject areas. It will be the responsibility of the LPDC to approve the plan and the activities within the plan for an educator to receive a license. The activities in the plan may be broader than course work and CEU programs. Many forms of job-embedded staff development may now be used for credentialing.

THE CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITIES

The establishment of a local professional development committee offers many opportunities. It allows districts to be much more engaged in the licensure and professional development of their teachers. By requiring teachers to align their professional development with building, district, student, and their own needs, professional development is intended to produce higher student achievement. The broader definition of professional development includes alternatives, such as study groups, collegial coaching, and action research. It encourages a different climate in schools, which engages educators in thoughtful, meaningful, and reflective activities about their practice and students.

As with all opportunities there are challenges. The configuration of the LPDC, which requires a majority of teachers, has been a major concern to superintendents and other administrators, along with the provision that the teachers association chooses the teachers on the committee if a bargaining unit exists. Another challenge is finding the time for committees to review and approve activities.

HAMILTON COUNTY PILOT

In March 1997, the Ohio Department of Education, through a competitive grant process awarded $50,000 grants to 21 pilot sites in the state. The purpose of the pilots was to work with the department to pilot the LPDC process and assist in the development of standards, policies, and procedures for the operation of LPDC. The Hamilton County Educational Service Center (HCESC) formed a consortium with eight school districts and the Archdiocese of Cincinnati to pilot the process. Our work consisted of several facets. We began in May 1997 with a planning meeting with the consortium to explore the new standards. It became evident from the beginning that it was a very ambiguous project. Other than the statute there was little other guidance on which to rely.

As we thought about the project, it seemed that to develop guidelines and procedures, districts needed to have a good conceptual framework for professional development. In June, the consortium spent two days studying the National Staff Development Council's *Standards for Staff Development*, learning the five models of staff development suggested by NSDC, and thinking about how to begin the process in individual districts. The NSDC standards, developed in 1994, provide guidelines on implementing effective staff development. The standards help to create the vision for effective staff development for all educators. All of the participating districts had similar needs for training, but each district wanted to develop its own policies and guidelines. In August, the consortium met again and studied the Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM), which describes the stages that individuals go through as they face change. CBAM helped participants to understand that when individuals are confronted with a change, they pass through predictable stages (personal, management, and impact concerns) and that there are specific strategies to assist people. At this meeting, we also generated another list of unanswered questions that we would work on getting answered at the next state pilot meeting.

By September, some districts had created information brochures about the new licensing standards and had begun to recruit educators to go through the pilot process. It has been difficult to recruit people to participate in the pilot program because, although the standards are in effect after January 1999, educators can have one grace renewal under old standards.

As part of the ongoing work of the consortium, quarterly information/update sessions have focused on major subject areas and national recommendations for that content. One of the concerns that has been voiced by content experts in our ESC was how the LPDC would be knowledgeable about the various content areas.

Another component of our consortium work has been designating a professional development specialist from each district. The specialists meet once a month to discuss individual district concerns and issues, develop suggested forms and guidelines, study additional research about professional development, and solve problems. This group allows us to have good communication between the districts and the HCESC. At its monthly meetings, this group brings all the pilot forms, guidelines, etc., so that each district can learn from the other districts. Another major task of this committee has been to develop guidelines for the alternative activities that will be able to be used in the future.

Still another component of our project has been to link with the University of Cincinnati's research and evaluation department to gather data and to produce a case study of the consortium work. A pre- and post-survey based on the NSDC standards was administered in June and will be administered again in May to determine if pilot sites changed and broadened their perception of professional development. Mid-year evaluations indicated that participating districts felt that they had been successful in setting up the LPDC, its processes and procedures, communicating the processes and procedures within the district, and piloting the process. Interestingly sharing beyond the district was seen as the most important facilitator, followed by teamwork and particular committee processes.

The above summary describes the work with our 10 districts in the pilot and our leadership efforts with them. In addition, our ESC has provided leadership at the state and regional level. As the director of the project and as past president of Staff Development Council of Ohio, Sue Showers was asked to work with the state as they developed the guidelines and procedures that will be distributed to the 624 districts in Ohio. The state has also held regional meetings in collaboration with the regional professional development center and the project director presented several of those meetings in collaboration with a certification representative. The project director also conducted workshops for the Ohio Educational Service Center Association, Ohio School Board Association, Staff Development Council of Ohio and Ohio Education Association, Ohio Personnel Directors, and other pilot sites about the process, the NSDC standards, and models of effective professional development.

Our ESC pilot has led in the sharing of information about the work of our pilot in our area through phone consultation and dissemination of draft guidelines. We have also created and delivered one-day workshops focusing on the future directions in professional development and the new licensure standards.

Model Building

Another facet of this project has been the "portfolio pioneers." As we worked with this project at various levels (state, regional, local) it was clear that there were many visions of the LPDC concept and different concepts about the ways individual plans could be developed. We recruited four teachers and they in turn recruited a project director to begin to develop some model portfolios that might be representative of the process. Our goal was to set an example of what we considered to be best practice to give a model for individual plans and portfolios. We have done research on portfolio development and have met on a monthly basis to share our work and thinking about the process. We also set as one of our goals to present our portfolio process at the next state Teaching and Learning Conference about our learnings to date.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the pilot year, several things have guided the work. From the beginning, we have viewed this as an ongoing learning and continuous improvement project. We have worked hard to develop an open communication system between the districts and encourage the sharing of documents, materials, etc. Spending time at the beginning to help pilot members build a solid conceptual framework about effective professional development was crucial to the work. Members agree that spending time developing the conceptual base allowed them to move forward with the project and feel that they were creating policies and procedures that support effective professional development. Perhaps the most important stimulus to our work in the pilot has been the vision for what this could mean for both students and educators in the state and sharing that vision with as many people as possible.

ONGOING ROLE OF HCESC

There are more than 500 districts, 13 of which in our service area, that were not involved in the pilot. This provides opportunities for leadership by our ESC and other ESCs in the state. In the future, HCESC will continue to work with the pilot districts. The professional development specialists have expressed the desire to continue working after the pilot. Another role for ESCs will be to continue to provide training for both pilots and non-pilots on effective staff development, models of staff development, teamwork, consensus building, goal planning, and portfolio

development. Another possible role will be to facilitate the establishment of LPDCs for consortium of agencies, such as Special Education Regional Resource Centers and private schools. Finally, because the state will no longer be issuing or tracking CEUs, our office will become a source for the issuance of CEUs and the necessary record keeping.

In conclusion, the participation of the ESC in LPDC work will increase the probability that job-embedded staff development and the professionalization of the teaching force will occur as a result of the new licensure standards. The potential now is for ESCs to take the leadership to assist, encourage, and identify models for real improvement in the teacher licensure system. However, if leadership does not come from the state and the ESCs, some districts will do the minimum required by law and the potential of the new standards will never be reached. Under this scenario, districts simply replace the state as credentialing agents. Ohio is one of the few states to give responsibility to educators to be involved in each other's licensure. This is a dramatic step in the professionalization of teaching. If Ohio can demonstrate higher quality professional development and improved collaboration between teachers and administrators, then it will serve as a model for other states to reform licensure. The vision that we shared in the beginning of this article will be more likely achieved through working with ESCs to define high quality professional development, set appropriate standards, and continue to develop successful models.

THE GALILEO CONSORTIUM: AN ESA LINK TO LOCAL DISTRICTS AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Motivated by mutual concerns and the belief that multiple perspectives would enhance their problem solving, five local superintendents, two ESA superintendents, and two community college presidents discussed challenges facing their organizations. They asked what could make a difference and expressed their frustrations with the slow pace of change. Their concerns covered a broad range of issues:

- A community college president stated that research should investigate new ways of teaching and learning that reach beyond the instructor.
- A K-12 superintendent wanted to open the entire high school to change.
- An ESA superintendent wanted to create new alliances between educational institutions to facilitate systemic reform.
- A K-12 superintendent was concerned about the relatively few numbers of people applying for principalships.
- An ESA superintendent expressed a desire to reduce transportation costs for school districts.

This CEO group met regularly over a two-year period to discuss their concerns[1]. Finally, they realized the common thread of their dialogue: a desire to develop leadership with the potential to address their current problems as well as challenges not yet envisioned.

This article summarizes how a small group of ESA superintendents, local superintendents, and community college presidents designed a vision that ultimately encompassed leadership development, systemic change, and inter-organizational collaboration.

THE CONCEPT AND DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERSHIP

In collaboration with John Burkhardt from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the CEO group started by asking a seminal question: "What is effective leadership? " Although Warren Bennis (1989) has asserted that leadership is "the most highly researched topic in the behavioral sciences," the concept remains elusive. Many models of leadership offer tantalizing theories and assumptions, for example:

- Thomas Sergiovanni (1992) suggests two reasons for our continuing lack of understanding of leadership in educational settings: "We have separated the hand of leadership from its head and its heart ... and we have separated the process of leadership from its substance."
- Warren Bennis (1989) believes courage is essential: "Managers do things right. Leaders do the right thing."
- Robert Greenleaf's servant leadership model (Frick and Spears, 1996), based on the assumption that human beings have the ability to act with other than their own self-interest, portrays the leader as a servant to the values and ideas of the organization and its community.

- Robert Kelly (1992) sees followership as both a precursor and an essential ingredient of effective leadership. In fact, he states that effective following is really the same as leadership, as both leaders and followers act on the basis of ideas, values, and commitments.
- The idea of leaders as followers is not new; 19th century French politician Alexandre Ledru-Rollin said, "There go my people. I must find out where they are going so I can lead them." Similarly, Benjamin Disraeli, the 19th century English prime minister, said, "I must follow the people. Am I not their leader?"

Theories regarding the ideal relationship of the leader to the organization also vary widely. Depending upon the model, leaders stand positioned at either the top or the bottom of an organizational pyramid, at the center of a wheel, or at the center of a single line. Sometimes they're invisible, "Leaders are best when people don't know they exist ... a good leader talks little when the work is done, the aim fulfilled" (author unknown).

Collectively, the CEO group shared a discomfort with both the differences and adequacy in current theories of leadership as well as methods used to prepare people for educational leadership positions. Furthermore, they realized that their organizations needed to be receptive to creating and nurturing leaders. One conclusion appeared clear: they needed a new model that would address not only the development of leaders but a process for restructuring the entire organization as well.

STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Patrick Dolan's (1994) model for structural reform appeared to offer an ideal means for providing both support for developing leaders and a vehicle for total system reform.

Dolan suggests inverting the traditional organization pyramid using board, union, and superintendent working as a team, "torqueing" against weaknesses in the system while providing employees with more information, control, respect, and a chance to grow. According to Dolan (1994), the following comprise the major parameters of change:

- A pre-existing social structure is always in place when you begin.
- The system will resist change in fundamental and powerful ways.
- Each organization's system is unique and requires careful attention to its particular characteristics, history, relationships, and leadership patterns.
- Although they may be unique, organizations nevertheless share fundamental attributes; understanding these generic characteristics is a good place to begin reform efforts.

According to Dolan, creating pressure toward systemic movement is accomplished by:

- Understanding the system in place and its dysfunctions.
- Designing the scaffolding or temporary structures that require opposite behavior or processes.
- Creating opportunities for key leadership to reflect together on these activities.

Dolan's model defines the board, superintendent, and union as the primary power bases of an educational organization; all three must be engaged in any successful reform effort. Dolan suggests the establishment of an oversight committee with representation from these three groups to create a safe forum for engaging in dialogue, devising solutions, and testing new plans.

Building on Dolan's guidelines, the CEOs developed a leadership academy that would operate in concert with organizational change.

DESIGN OF THE PROJECT

The CEOs selected the name the Southeastern Michigan Galileo Consortium for two reasons. First, Galileo challenged our assumptions about the solar system, and, second, the probe that bears his name continues to challenge our minds and spirits as it explores our universe[2].

In spite of the Inquisition, Galileo's ideas survived. In order that the ideal of public education should survive as well, the CEOs started with three assumptions:

- Recognize instructors as leaders in their classrooms, communities, and campuses or schools.
- Redesign public education systems as learning organizations to successfully accept appropriate and constructive forms of leadership.
- Establish models of cooperation among education organizations for greater flexibility and effectiveness in meeting student needs.

With the dual goals of transforming both leaders and organizations, the CEOs envisioned an academy that would differ from traditional leadership development programs in three ways. It would:

- Provide support for developing leaders within their own organizations.
- Establish a structure and strategy for effecting organizational change.
- Build on collaboration with other education organizations to strengthen fledgling reform efforts.

ORGANIZATION FOR CHANGE

The CEOs organized a structure for supporting reform as shown in Figure 1. In lieu of a director, the project was designed by a five-member Facilitation Team consisting of staff, board, and union representatives from a cross-section of the consortium.

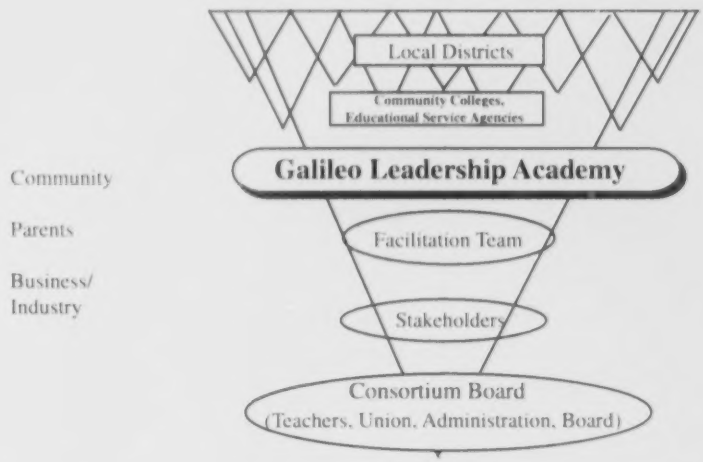

Figure 1. Southeastern Michigan Galileo Consortium Model for Leadership Development and Organizational Reform (Dolan, 1996).

Other structural characteristics include:

- A Consortium Board representing union, superintendent, and board of education from all nine agencies. Their role consists of setting direction for the project.
- Academy participants, i.e., "leaders," work with their local improvement teams and serve as liaisons to the facilitation team and consortium board.
- A stakeholders group composed of approximately six representatives of top administration, board, and union from each organization. The group meets regularly to continue the exploration of systemic change and mutual collaboration.

The entire evaluation process, including monitoring and feedback, supports the philosophy of continuous learning and adjustment through the employment of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The Wayne County Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) staff provide the operational leadership and coordination for the project. As the initial euphoria subsided and the grinding work began, the ESA role gained

importance as personnel in local districts and community colleges found it necessary to address other priorities. It is this sustaining function provided by the ESA that appears to make the difference in the project's ongoing success.

ACADEMY CURRICULUM

The Galileo Leadership Academy provides a forum for advanced level dialogue with the following components:

- Mentors and protégés connect leaders to their own organization.
- Curriculum mastery includes knowledge of the profession, inter- and intrapersonal skills, and systems thinking.
- Participants are part of an area-wide network,
- Change strategies are applied both within and across consortium agencies.

The overall goal for academy leaders focuses on their working effectively to make changes within their organizations by:

- taking leadership roles in work teams,
- serving as master, or lead, instructors,
- serving as staff resource persons,
- championing new initiatives,
- serving as liaisons between the school and the community,
- engaging in action research, and
- adopting the role of a true leader through stewardship and community building.

Academy leaders examine issues such as leadership knowledge and skills, systemic organizational change, learning organizations, brain research, strengthening society and education through diversity, and technology.

PROGRESS TO DATE

Beginning in summer 1997, 70 educators from the nine consortium organizations began the two-year academy program. Evidence that these activities are producing results comes from the participants who report a number of personal and organizational impacts. They indicate changes in the way they think, what they do, how they feel about themselves, and in their interactions with others. A total of 104 statements about personal changes were made by 94% of academy participants. Institutional effects noted by 65% included reforms in communications systems, the process of decision making, and the laying of groundwork for future changes.

Reform in one K-12 district is described by C. Robert Maxfield, superintendent of the Farmington Public Schools in Farmington, Michigan. He credits the project with serving as a catalyst for change through the definition of teacher leadership in conjunction with a reexamination of communication and decision making across the organization. Maxfield cites as examples, "the role of the nine Galileo leaders in facilitating a district-wide dialogue on elementary restructuring; an ongoing series of meetings among board of education members, union leaders, and central administration; and a serious commitment to pursue a collaborative approach to collective bargaining."

Consortium board members have discovered how difficult it is to cooperate and collaborate with each other, and this may be the biggest lesson learned so far. Although all nine organizations focus on the broad goal of learning, their cultures and goals differ significantly. Cooperative projects between the K-12 districts and community colleges thus far have included early college enrollment for high school students and sharing staff resources. However, the potential of ESAs to serve as conduits may spark further organizational links between community colleges and local districts as inter-organizational collaboration is developed and formalized.

The collaboration and cooperation components will be explored more fully in the future as the second cohort of leaders enrolls in summer 1999.

As academy leaders develop and consortium organizations adapt to change, they are forming a kind of interpersonal dynamic analogous to Peter Senge's (1992) definition of an effective team: nine organizations together able to do more than any one alone.

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ENDNOTES:

1. The group includes Marlene Davis, Southfield Public Schools; Michael Flanagan, Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency; James Geisler, Walled Lake Community Schools; George Keith, Oakland Community College; Emmett Lippe, Novi Community Schools; C. Robert Maxfield, Farmington Public Schools; Richard McDowell, Schoolcraft College; James Redmond, Oakland Intermediate School District; Leonard Rezmierski, Northville Public Schools; John Burkhardt, W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

2. We think of Galileo as a scientist and a heretic, but one who recanted. Was he a leader? Actually, Galileo continued to lead, but without formal power. He continued his earlier, noncontroversial studies of mechanics and the laws of motion, publishing a book that laid the foundations of modern physics and engineering. This conceptual framework and laws of motion could be used later to provide more effective proof of the earth's rotation around the sun than any he had been able to formulate earlier (Finocchiaro, 1989).

ESA CONSORTIA FOR NETWORKING USING THE INTERNET

by
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As school improvement efforts continue across our country, we are learning a great deal about successful programming for students. Also, the ability to communicate effective innovations quickly and efficiently is becoming increasingly important. The New York State Effective Schools Consortia Network (ESCN), initiated in1979, has become a highly efficient and cost beneficial method of identifying successful programs and sharing information about them throughout the state.

The benefits of this consortia network are substantial to the 41 ESAs that make up the network and their 740 constituent school districts. By bringing schools together for staff development or any other common need, the cost per school drops substantially. By systematically sharing (networking) information, the best programs, trainers, planning materials, and other resources are easily made available to New York State's 4,100 schools. Effort, time, and money aren't wasted recreating wheels.

The structure of the ESCN was established in New York by the State Education Department acting through educational service agencies, the 41 Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). The state is organized into five consortia regions. Each region has a regional manager and about eight BOCES as well as one large city school district and a non-public school representative. The superintendent of each BOCES, a city school district representative and a non-public school representative act as a regional Executive Committee that governs the consortium in each area. The Executive Committees meet four to six times per year.

Each superintendent designates one staff member to work with the regional manager for purposes of school improvement. Since many BOCES already offer services such as staff development, curriculum development, planning, and other programs, this network pools their expertise. Services not available directly through some of the smaller BOCES now become available to their component districts through the network.

The five regional managers meet monthly with the State Education Department Office of School Improvement. Thus, the entire state is effectively networked for school improvement program ideas, methods, and materials. New developments are shared easily and quickly.

Any state that has an educational service agency delivery system could replicate the effective schools consortia for school improvement and other school services. The consortia presently shares program information for staff development, curriculum, planning, employee assistance programs, and a wide variety of other school services. Once the network is in place, its potential uses for program sharing are unlimited. The ESCN has a web site that lists resources available to schools and can assist with all aspects of reform as well as traditional school concerns. A similar site could be easily replicated by an individual ESA or area consortia. The web site can be found at http://nt.lhric.org/escn.

Twenty years of operation indicates that the ESAs find the consortia mutually beneficial. The turf issues that frequently impede interagency cooperation have been successfully overcome. The consortia is a win - win operation. Each BOCES has exclusive right to provide services to its school constituents while having access to the resources of all BOCES. Each BOCES broadens its market for services by being able to offer them through any other BOCES that does not offer a particular service.

The New York State Education Department has been diminishing in size dramatically over the last decade. This process has been accelerating recently. The effect has been the devolution of ever increasing responsibilities to the ESAs. In turn, the ESAs have not generally been able to expand their staffs to any significant degree. Indeed, most have also been downsizing. The consortia has enabled the ESAs to expand many services to their constituent school districts.

Systematic interaction and sharing between ESAs and the districts they serve greatly benefit all involved. Savings from pooling resources and training programs greatly exceed the relatively small cost of the Consortia, which involves one professional and one clerical staff member in each of the five regions in New York State. These positions originally were funded through school improvement grants. The state education department subsequently found them to be so useful in school improvement efforts that they are now a permanent item in the department budget.

Since resources for staff development are increased through the network, staff development programs and budgets have increased in almost all of the BOCES. Although New York has a few small BOCES that don't have their own staff development programs, these smaller entities can now can provide access to quality programs to their constituent school districts via the network. This is done in two ways:

1. By sharing information on effective programs, the network provides far more information than individual ESAs and school districts could identify on their own. The consortia provides far greater awareness and use of existing resources.

2. By opening many training sessions to schools beyond its individual component school districts, each ESA generates more revenue to support programs. Sometimes this makes the difference between being able to afford a program and not having access to it.

Numerous programs have already been shared through the network. A few examples include the following:

1. The Comprehensive School Improvement Planning Process, validated by the New York State Education Department, has been delivered to hundreds of schools all across the state.

2. Needs assessment surveys for planning and assessment developed by the consortia have been used by more than 4,000 schools.

3. The network effectively trained more than 5,000 fourth grade teachers to holistically score a new fourth grade state writing test.

Programs can be shared in a variety of ways:

1. A successful staff development program in one part of the state can be replicated in another. For example, the program trainers travel to another BOCES, which handles all program logistics and invites interested constituent districts to attend the training session.

2. Turnkey trainers can be trained in each BOCES to deliver a particular program. These can be BOCES or constituent district staff. These individuals will then train in their own BOCES and/or local districts. For example, BOCES recruited district staff with expertise in writing can carry out the holistic scoring training mentioned above.

3. A BOCES with a unique program can open it up to attendance from school districts in other BOCES that do not wish to provide the program themselves. Thus, one BOCES might have school districts from up to 41 service agencies attend its programming although it is more common that proximate BOCES usually constitute most the audience.

4. All BOCES contribute programs, practices, and resources to the consortia web site. This causes greater participation in programs in each service agency and makes these programs known and available to any other BOCES that wants to use them.

Stephen Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, has observed that successful organizations of the future will be those that learn new ways to cooperate and make maximum use of limited resources, that is to "think win - win." Educational service agencies are the ideal organization to create such a win - win network.

RURAL, REMOTE, AND UNDERSERVED

by
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It figures that the guy who is most frightened by heights and water would be given the new job of flying out to the islands over the ocean. The term "white knuckler, " an expression never heard before, now meant something very real, as the wind-tossed small aircraft bore down on a gravel and mud island airstrip. My hands had a death grip on the door handles. Where was that dry, safe desk job I thought I had just landed? The bush pilot looked somewhat nonchalant, which didn't add to my sense of life-threatening desperation. All this just to go visit a student teacher?!

Nine years later, my job has never lost its sense of adventure. It started out as an experimental project by the state of Washington. Its goal was to have five of the nine educational service districts (ESDs) help state universities place student teachers in rural, remote, and underserved school districts. This would allow local school districts who did not fall into traditional, university placement service areas to host student teachers. It would also allow interns to have an opportunity to try teaching in a rural or remote classroom or, in many cases, to be able to go home to live, saving money on rent. The local districts, for their part, would have an intern that often brought new ideas and always a rush of energy. It also gave the remote districts underserved by the universities, a long-term look at a potential new employee, one who at the end of the internship would have a real feel for living in a remote area, thereby offering better odds at new-teacher retention.

An area designated as "rural" or "remote" is not hard to find in the state of Washington. It is as large and geographically diverse a state as can be found anywhere. Its school districts are located among the snowcapped Cascade mountains, on the wind-whipped San Juan Islands in the Pacific Ocean, in rolling farm country, or on huge stretches of desert in the eastern part of the state.

Traditionally, the state's universities have taken good care of their interns, usually placing them in local school districts within a 75 -mile driving radius of the campus. The larger teacher education schools have satellite offices as well, often targeting the urban areas. But in the late 1980s a state senator had a constituent whose daughter wanted to come home to live and do her student teaching locally rather than 350 miles away, where the university was located. It couldn't be done. No university supervisor was available nor was the school positioned to place an intern that far away. To the senator it didn't make sense that the university was so localized in its placement. Thus, a program idea was born.

But even if the state legislature provided the money, who would be qualified and geographically positioned to help place, monitor, and evaluate the interns? Enter the educational service districts. The nine ESDs were already situated throughout the state, and they were already acting on many different levels as a liaison for local school districts, state government, and universities. It was a natural. Or so it seemed.

Many state universities immediately saw the potential benefits of the student teacher pilot project (STPP), as the program was called. They would be able to place interns in areas heretofore inaccessible to them. Their traditional school sites were sometimes overutilized with interns who were not always welcomed with enthusiasm. This new program would place interns where none had gone before, and the state would help pay for it! Other universities balked, not wanting to give up their traditional roles, citing concerns over jurisdiction loss, inability to oversee quality control, or even a potential loss of supervisor jobs. Thus, some universities willingly joined in and took advantage of the help while others held back, either joining later or never really becoming involved.

For Northwest ESD 189, located in the most northwesterly corner of the state, covering five counties (two being island counties and one very mountainous county) and serving 35 school districts (145,000 students), it meant that small planes, ferry boats, and long car rides through mountain passes were to become the norm, not the exception. It was a pleasant new role for the ESD since it brought interns into school settings that welcomed them with open arms and allowed future teachers to be introduced to the many resources an educational service agency can provide.

For the ESD it was also an important job and a veritable link to the future. The student teacher who wanted to experience a remote placement, or who came from a remote area and wanted to teach near home, now had the opportunity to do so. It turned out to be a win - win situation for everyone involved. To address the colleges' concerns over quality control and oversight, the ESD used university forms and procedures specific to the institution with which they worked. Starting in 1989, the ESD representative became a participant in a variety of university field services planning committees. In a very short time, the ESD representatives were an integral part of the universities' tactical plan to service their student teachers. Communications between the ESDs and universities developed trust and good working relationships. Visits to university campuses to interview potential student interns and meet with college faculty insured the blending of theory and practice. A strong collaborative partnership has developed over time. Northwest ESD 189, one of the five ESDs involved in the program, now has 12 to 15 interns per semester representing multiple state universities.

Nine years later, having placed, monitored, and helped start the careers of more than 200 young adults in the Northwest ESD 189 region alone, I can say that it has been a wild but very worthwhile ride. Interns - turned - teachers continue to stop by to say "Hello" and use ESD services, often voicing gratitude for the foresight of a senator and a state legislature for the "rural and remote" program. I guess maybe all those bumpy airplane landings, wave-tossed boat rides, and long drives just might have helped.

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